

February 13, 2020

TO: HONORABLE FRED GIROD AND HONORABLE PAUL HOLVEY,
CO-CHAIRS;

MEMBERS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION

FROM: KIMBERLY COOPER JAQUA, PORTLAND / EUGENE

RE: ADDING CAPITAL FUNDING FOR PSU'S VERNIER SCIENCE CENTER TO
HB 5201

I write in support of the use of public funds to renovate and improve Science Building I on the Portland State University campus— a facility that is in dire need of updates that will have a broad and positive impact on the lives of Oregonians.

My first-hand knowledge of the structure stems from a variety of capacities— including as a Past President of the PSU Foundation, Past President of the PCC Foundation, Executive Committee member at OMSI, Blue Ribbon Committee for the OHSU Knight Cancer Center, donor to the University of Oregon, Oregon State, and multiple community colleges and private schools, colleges and universities, as well as many other leadership roles in the community focused on promoting the advancement of science literacy— a capability that is vital to Oregon's health and prosperity. Of all of these institutions, PSU's Science Building sadly lags behind the others in its facilities ONLY, and must be brought into the modern age of science, compatible with the intellectual abilities and capabilities of its talented faculty and students to advance great research and to prepare Oregonians for a life where science touches us all.

My passion as a champion for the tens of thousands of first-generation students and hundreds of thousands citizens-of-tomorrow who thrive at PSU is indeed the most powerful motivation to advocate for the desperately-needed improvements in Science I; I am confident that you have received the data on this, and will instead share a personal story that shocked me into awareness and may further highlight the issue at hand.

Our daughter and son took classes at PSU, and they compared the physical labs there to those of their other schools— public and private high schools, community colleges, and public and private universities— and regularly recounted stories of their excellent professors and fellow students who were hamstrung by basic physical deficits in the facilities, which did not appear to have been upgraded for generations since my parents studied there, despite the revolutions in science and technology in those many decades past. For example, a fundamental skill in a chemistry class—being able to measure

liquid in a beaker—could not be easily practiced because the water from the tap that was the basis for safe instruction was rusted shut, only finally coming out in a massive eruption that literally sprayed all over the students. Similarly, an emergency shower station designed to wash off any inadvertent chemical spills from a person produced brown rusty water when practiced in a drill. Regardless of the fact that it would have had the necessary effect of washing off a chemical and they had a separate eye wash station, it seemed such an unnecessary injustice when I heard it that it has stayed with me five years later.

Of course, Oregonians' fundamental right to access to clean water is something we hold dear—but this story symbolizes importantly the inequities in opportunity for all Oregonians to receive a quality education and become vital contributors to a prosperous and thriving community. Fortunately, that is something we as Oregonians have the power to change, and you, especially, have the power to impact almost immediately by allocating funds for the structural updates and improvements of PSU's Science Building I.

Our family believes—and we dedicate our time and resources in support—that education is life's great elevator. It lifts people up to places they never knew they could reach, and by changing their trajectories has a demonstrably positive ripple effect on their lives, and the lives of those around them. It's a core factor in enabling Oregonians to transition successfully from a resource economy to a blended service and resource economy. Science education is a fundamental underpinning for success in the modern economy, and all of our Oregon students— regardless of whether they can afford private college tuition, or start at a community college and work their way through a public university like PSU— deserve a quality learning experience. The best learning is more than just knowing something—it's also about being able to do something with that knowledge. Clearly, it is only one example, but sometimes that starts with being able to measure a beaker of water.

In my role as Vice Chair of the Oregon Community Foundation Board, I see progress being made on issues like this around the state as we focus on closing the “opportunity gap” for Oregonians every day, championing access and quality of experience for all Oregonians, regardless of their ability to personally pay for that opportunity. Private philanthropy can seed opportunities that help close those gaps, and vital public funding widens pathways that influences broad impact and helps make everything possible. This particular “opportunity gap” in science learning experience at PSU could be closed through a great potential partnership seeded by a generous gift of support from caring individuals and a sage council of public leaders committed to broadening the pathways and ensuring a brighter future for all Oregonians.

WITH SINCERE THANKS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION OF UPGRADING PSU'S SCIENCE BUILDING I, AND WITH HEARTFELT GRATITUDE FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE TO ALL OREGONIANS.