

March 10, 2021

To: Chair and House Democratic Leader Barbara Smith Warner, Vice Chair and House Republican Leader Christine Drazan, Vice Chair Paul Holvey and Members of the Committee:

I write this letter as a community member and as someone who has headed nonprofits both in Portland and throughout the rest of the state, first at Literary Arts, Inc., then Caldera Arts, then the Mercy Corps Action Center, and finally College Possible.

I believe the issues of a corporate board of directors are the same for commercial companies as they are for nonprofits. The real importance of a board goes beyond hiring and firing the CEO and setting direction and governance for a company. The real value is to make the company strong, relevant and sustainable. I write in strong support of House Bill 3110. Our businesses have had a long time to include women and people from underrepresented communities on their boards of directors. Some have done so, but the numbers are still unacceptably low.

HB 3110 is a meaningful step in the direction of ensuring that diversity and the nurturing it brings can be made a reality for the good of Oregon's companies.

In the 90's it was apparent that our community of nonprofits needed to "diversify" their boards. We knew it was probably a good idea but we didn't know what it meant. I think for a while it was viewed as a gesture of inclusion but not much more. It could be a way of mixing with other sets of leaders we did not usually encounter.

For me, in taking a summer business session for business leaders at Stanford, I experienced the true meaning and benefits of a diversified group working together. In our session we were divided into groups that were diverse and we able to see that members with different backgrounds, ethnicities, training and life experiences, when competing with each other, produced much broader and effective results. It became apparent that if we allowed ourselves to go "outside the norm" of what boards looked like, we had the self-serving benefits of getting information that we could not get on our own. The stories at the table would be different than ours and would bring us added information that could only move the group forward.

The conventional stakeholders at the table learned from women and people of underrepresented communities who added facts and knowledge to the conversation. Each brought a wealth of information about themselves and their communities. And guess what. We did a better job of reaching our goals. Our results were more relevant to the world, and not just our little worlds. Diversity is not primarily a gesture of inclusion. It uniquely results in benefits and strengths from other voices with different backgrounds and information that are new to us, strengthening our groups and companies.

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