



Dear Chair Wagner, Vice Chair Girod, and members of the Senate Rules committee,

For the record, my name is Emily Wanous and I am the Legislative Director for the Oregon Student Association. I am testifying in support of the -2 amendments for SB854, which would strengthen accountability of the Board of Trustees of our 7 public universities.

This session, the Oregon Student Association advocated alongside staff, faculty, for \$900 million to the Public University Support Fund, with the ask that there is increased accountability from the Universities. SB854 has some critical but small and very implementable policy changes which would help get the kind of increased accountability students want. In order for the Board of Trustees to achieve their intended purpose and mission, it is vital that we increase accessibility and transparency of these bodies. We hear from students frequently that the Board of Trustees model is not working on several campuses--student advocates are not being granted equal access to these decision makers.

SB854 requires board members to have publicly available email addresses. Decision makers need to hear directly from students, staff and faculty in order to make informed decisions that will affect campus constituencies. In addition, the bill would dedicate time in meetings for student, staff, and faculty representatives to report out. As we've switched to virtual meetings, instances of some institutional boards shutting out faculty, staff, and students have increased. For example, Western Oregon University students have found it hard to get time on the agenda for Board meetings to discuss important issues, and had trouble even reaching their trustees. There has been the perception by some that administration has engaged in gatekeeping behavior. In the past, when campus constituencies want to provide input on a matter, the boards will push them to public comment. Virtual meetings have often limited the public comment section to written. Similar to the impact of verbal testimony in the Legislature, students deserve space to comment on decisions made by the board in a way that is an intentional and thoughtful means of communication.

Furthermore, when the board secretary is a member of university administration, we see gatekeeping in the form of filtered information being shared with the board. SB854 prohibits a member of administration from holding this position and allows the boards who currently work within this dynamic to find a new secretary in 91 days. OSA would like to see further policy address the role of the board secretary.

A key role of the boards is determining the offering list of majors and minors each academic year and students have raised concerns time and time again with the lack of oversight in this process. This past year, the WOU board cut (x) majors and (x) minors without any review from the HECC simply because the university does not deem the cut a "significant change". For those students currently in the program, prospective students, and the faculty teaching those courses, such cuts are significant and should be labeled as such. SB854 requires all cuts that have been announced but not yet effective are subject to HECC review.

In addition, SB854 will solidify in statute the board must form a presidential hiring committee. This is current practice, but we have the opportunity to clarify the accountability of the board by specifying in statute. The president of the universities represent and serve thousands of students and these matters must be handled with the care the position demands. Student, staff and faculty voices are vital to the decision, which is why it must be required the hiring committee includes representation from student, staff, and faculty groups.

We hear time and time again that there is a lack of trust in Salem and amongst the public at large regarding our university decision makers-- SB 854 creates some small changes that could go a long way in developing further trust. Students have been asking for increased transparency from the boards for years and we are thankful to Rep. McLain, Rep. Evans, and Sen. Frederick for introducing this important piece of legislation. The bill's impact is effective on passage because these blatant forms of gatekeeping must be removed so there can be clear forms of communication between campus constituencies and their boards.

Thank you for your time and I ask for your support on SB854,

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