

**Paul L Evans**  
**STATE REPRESENTATIVE**  
**DISTRICT 20**



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

June 3, 2021

Senator Rob Wagner, Chair  
Senate Committee on Rules  
Oregon State Senate  
Oregon Capitol Building  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Ref: SB 854

Senator Wagner and Honorable Members of the Senate Rules Committee:

This letter is in support of the passage of Senate Bill 854 (SB 854). I believe the measure is a critical improvement to the existing board of trustee structure within Oregon Higher Education. As drafted, the measure will expand the scale and scope of perspectives too often overlooked under current law.

I have spent much of my adult life in higher education. It is because of this decades-long experience I can tell you without hesitation or equivocation that Oregon has lost significant ground since the balkanization of the statewide public system. While adjustments were needed to improve the former Oregon University System, we have devolved into a hot mess: campuses compete for scarce resources under different rules – the research universities against the TRUs (Technical and Regional Universities) – the geographical favorites against the most remote. It is not an equitable, rational, or sustainable “system,” and we must do what we can, where we can, to make improvements.

Strengthening the board of trustees is the first step. We must make structural changes for these boards to regain the credibility and the trust of their respective campus communities. Once we have a better understanding of the individual campuses, we can begin the process of strategic reclamation of the shared functions abandoned in the dysfunction that is the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission. This bill is necessary to stem the bleeding. More work will be required in the future, but I can assure you this: absent passage of this bill, there will even more drama across the higher education landscape as ill-suited boards of trustees expand, rather than collapse, the deep divide between “administration” policies and “campus community” priorities.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter and of SB 854. I strongly urge passage as an initial step forward for a non-system of higher education in crisis.

Respectfully,

Oregon House of Representatives  
District 20