



February 15, 2021

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of OR, we respectfully express our support for House Bill 564, but we do so with reservations that we hope will be addressed by the Committee.

SB 564 asks the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to design a question or questions that will "allow each student to identify whether the student is a parent, a person acting as a parent or a legal guardian."

We believe this language will defeat the ultimate purpose of the bill -- which is to identify students who need services in order to care for their children while also attending school. Properly obtained data, for example, could compare graduation rates of students taking care of children versus those of other students, or assess the success of certain programs.

As currently drafted, however, "parent" would include a parent who has a child[ren] not residing with that parent or for whom the parent is no longer providing financial or other assistance. It would, for example, include myself -- a parent of a 38-year-old employed son living with his partner in a separate residence.

"Legal guardians" are similarly not always acting in a direct caretaking role, but may for example, be simply handling financial affairs.

The phrase "acting as a parent" or "acting in a parental role" is closer to the type of student that should be counted in order to achieve the underlying goal of this legislation, but it could be improved upon.

The intent of the legislation would be better served by adding the phrase "and who is acting in a caretaking role." The operative language would therefore be to design a question or questions that will "allow each student to identify whether the student is a parent, a person acting as a parent or a legal guardian and who is acting in a caretaking role."

This additional language does not improperly exclude individuals who should be counted. For example, it would include a student in a caretaking role who is also claimed by a parent as a dependent for tax purposes, a student who is sharing custody with another parent but who is also caring for another person, and a student who is caring for a sibling or stepchild.

It may very well be that HECC will be cognizant of these issues when it drafts the question or questions, but in the spirit of getting it right at the outset and ensuring the data measures what it is intended to measure, it would be better to add the proposed language now.

We are fully aware of the significant challenges that students face today as they try to balance their own needs, the needs of those they are caring for, and the need to obtain an education that will create a more fulfilling and prosperous future for all. We just want to make sure that these students receive the services they need and deserve.

Respectfully Submitted,

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