



Testimony on House Bill 2237
House Veterans and Emergency Management Committee
February 18, 2021

Chair Evans, Vice-Chairs Lewis and Meek, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), the state agency and commission charged, among other things, with state-wide higher education policy coordination and the distribution of state financial aid. Thank you for the opportunity provide testimony on HB 2237.

The Commission believes that financial aid, particularly state financial aid dollars for low income students through the Oregon Opportunity Grant, should be available to students with as few access barriers as possible. One demonstration of this principle is that no application for the Oregon Opportunity Grant is required. A student's submission of a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is all that is needed to automatically qualify and award most students for state aid. This is purposeful, as there is a high level of correlation between students that qualify for state aid and students that have lower levels of fluency with, and fewer resources to draw on to support, higher education access. HB 2237 adds a requirement that predominately affects the least-resource advantaged students in Oregon, and the existence of this requirement may result in fewer otherwise qualified students receiving financial aid. The Commission is not currently aware of any other state that predicates state aid for low-income students on the completion of a non-higher education requirement, though our research on this point is ongoing.

This bill will have a fiscal impact to the agency. Because we do not currently require applications for our largest financial aid program, the Commission will have to develop verification mechanisms to ensure that any student receiving \$1,000 or more in state aid has met the requirements of the bill, and hire staff to handle verification, unanticipated issues, and questions. As the state financial aid information system is outdated and in need of replacement (the GRB proposes funding for phase one of this project), developing verification mechanisms that work within current technological limitations will likely require significant IT staff time. Finally, this requirement will need to be communicated clearly and repeatedly to the tens-of-thousands of Oregon students that are eligible for state financial aid.

Thank you for your time today.