



Testimony on House Bill 2919

House Education Committee

February 25, 2021

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chairs Neron and Weber, 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). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2919.

This bill is an expansion of provisions of HB 2013, introduced (but not passed) in 2019, and represents the product of a workgroup conversation in the 2020 session and interim period in which HECC was deeply engaged.

Over the last six years, HECC has directly managed or contracted for, due to legislative mandate, programs and grant making designed to create a library of open educational resources (OER). OER resources are materials that are freely distributable and modifiable by any user, and can substitute for traditional commercial course materials at no or very low cost to the student. The legislature has funded and HECC has supported this work because college textbooks and associated materials are expensive and the rate of increase for the cost of these materials has far outpaced the increase in not only the consumer price index, but wage increases, home values, medical costs, and tuition and fees. Students have reacted to these expensive, and very often hidden costs in different ways: buying used materials, renting books, downloading materials, or simply not using the materials at all. This bill seeks to offer students a potentially powerful additional option: taking a course they know has lower materials costs.

The course materials market does not operate like a traditional open and free market. In the current market, the instructor generally chooses the materials, but the students pay for the cost of that decision. Publishers are incentivized to cater to the needs of the instructor, and while many instructors utilize cost as a factor, highly-price sensitive students pay whatever price the publisher demands, because the decision to buy the book has already been made for them.

This bill does not change this dynamic, but offers students a powerful tool that may help reduce their overall materials costs: information at the time of course registration such that they can plan for costs, and the ability to make alternative decisions about the courses and sections they choose. By providing students with material cost information at the time of registration, students can weigh the total cost of registering in a particular course section, and pursue other, cheaper courses or sections. If one student does this, they'll be able to save on materials costs. If enough students do this, instructors, institutions, and publishers will note this behavior, and alter how they publish and choose materials to be responsive to the behavior of students, positively benefiting students in the long run.

Thank you for your time today.