



February 3, 2022

To: Chair Kathleen Taylor
Senate Committee on Labor and Business

From: Zach Lindahl, Director, Public Policy and Government Relations

Subject: Support for Senate Bill 1545, Future Ready Oregon 2022

Dear Chair Taylor and Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Business:

The Washington County Chamber represents more than 750 businesses providing over 50,000 jobs in Washington County. Our businesses are diverse, both large and small, and represent many different sectors. The Washington County Chamber of Commerce is very supportive of Senate Bill 1545, Future Ready Oregon and the vital investment into workforce development it provides.

Washington County is known as the economic engine for the State of Oregon for good reason when considering the amount of private sector investment and number of high paying jobs the County has experienced over the past decade.

However, we still have real challenges and at the top of that list right now is an extremely constrained labor force. A recent headline announced there were more job openings in Oregon than Oregonians to fill them. If you are an employer with numerous positions fill, this is disheartening to say the least. It's also a true economic imperative for Washington County and the State of Oregon. If you added together the cumulative salaries of the vacant positions in the State right now, you would surely be talking about millions of dollars sitting on the sidelines waiting for qualified candidates.

Moving incumbent workers up the income trajectory by providing specific, relevant skills training opportunities, ensuring our students are prepared for the high paying careers available to them in their own backyards and seeking innovative solutions outside traditional workforce development pathways are important investments that SB 1545 provides.

We are supportive of this legislation for four key reasons:

- Investment into existing, successful programs that provide career-connected opportunities. Many of the employers in Washington County have found that these programs outlined in SB 1545 have yielded great results in finding top talent, especially in the areas of healthcare, manufacturing, and construction.
- The \$95 million investment into Competitive Workforce Readiness Grants. This investment will give residents of Oregon a more affordable path to valuable knowledge and skills, the ability for employers to develop their own training programs, and for businesses to help cover the expenses of running a business. The relief and stress these grants could alleviate will help both employers and job seekers alike.

- There is tremendous value in what this legislation will do for our most underserved, which will in turn improve the diversity of our workforce. The recruitment, retention, and investment in these communities will pay dividends, and help address several of the inequities countless Oregonians face every day.
- The \$200 million investment comes from ARPA and general funds. Many of the employers in Oregon are still fighting to get back to a pre-pandemic level of business, and any additional burden could be the difference between keeping the doors open or closing them forever.

Once again, we urge your support for Senate Bill 1545, and I thank you for your time.