

February 2, 2022

Chair Kathleen Taylor  
Vice Chair Tim Knopp  
Senate Labor and Business Committee  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Support for SB 1545, *Future Ready Oregon***

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Knopp, and members of the Committee,

I write in support of SB1545, Future Ready Oregon. This legislation addresses the immediate need to help Oregonians prepare for well-paying jobs critical for Oregon's economy and sets the stage for a much more effective career development system.

The pandemic has exposed and intensified a gnawing challenge we have faced over many years. In our dynamic economy, jobs disappear through automation, the rise of new technologies, and other disruptions. Often, adults displaced by such changes are unable to access the support and additional education they need to seize new opportunities. The delivery services to provide such support are scattered, uncoordinated, and underfunded. Those most disadvantaged and hurt by these system failures are people of color, rural Oregonians, and Oregonians who have grown up in poverty.

SB 1545 includes an excellent framework to address these challenges.

Initial funding will immediately expand existing successful programs to provide education, training, and additional support services to Oregonians hurt by the pandemic. With these added resources, local Workforce Investment Boards, Community Colleges, and the Bureau of Labor and Industries all will be called on to ramp up effective services already in place.

Additional funding will be used to pursue new models of service delivery that bring together education and training, career counseling, and wraparound supports to meet the specific needs of underserved populations – people of color, rural Oregonians, veterans, incarcerated populations, young people disconnected from education, and Oregonians with low incomes.

As we learn what works best through a rigorous assessment of results, Oregon will be poised to expand the best models in the years ahead.

SB 1545 represents an historic opportunity to improve the lives of Oregonians and grow our economy. I urge support for it.

Sincerely,



Duncan Wyse  
President  
Oregon Business Council

# SUPPORT FOR SB1545, *FUTURE READY OREGON'S* WORKFORCE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

## The Opportunity

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Oregon entered the decade facing a shortage of 300,000 postsecondary credentials, such as apprenticeship, degrees, or certificates, to meet the skill requirements of an evolving Oregon economy. The investments proposed in Future Ready Oregon offer a chance to overcome historical disparities in education, training, and employment that have impeded the prospects of people from BIPOC, rural, and low-income communities.

In answer to this challenge, a broad coalition of community-based organizations, employers, labor unions, and others has teamed up with workforce boards, community colleges, apprenticeship programs, and social service providers to craft and support the Racial Justice Council's Future Ready Oregon initiative.

The Legislature has a **once-in-a-generation opportunity** to support this initiative, starting with a \$200 million investment to achieve two critical goals:

1. Prepare, employ, and advance thousands of Oregonians displaced during the pandemic into satisfying family wage careers in manufacturing, health care, and construction.
2. Build coalitions and institutional capacity to improve service delivery and career-connected learning opportunities for tens of thousands of additional Oregonians in the decades ahead.

**Funding this proposal will transform the lives of Oregonians disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and existing disparities, while realizing the full potential of Oregon's diverse workforce and making our economy stronger and more resilient.**

## The Need

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The pandemic has exposed a gnawing challenge we have faced over many years. In our dynamic economy, jobs disappear through automation, the rise of new technologies, and other disruptions. Often, adults displaced by such changes are unable to access the support and additional education they need to seize new opportunities. The delivery services to provide such support are scattered, uncoordinated, and underfunded. Those most disadvantaged and hurt by these system failures are people of color, rural Oregonians, and Oregonians who have grown up in poverty.

The 285,000 Oregonians who lost their jobs between February and April last year vividly experienced the shortcomings of our workforce system. With Oregon still below pre-pandemic employment levels, many Oregonians still need help. Job losses occurred disproportionately in low-wage occupations – especially in the leisure and hospitality sector. This disproportionately impacted women, people of color, youth, and those with less than a college degree.

Future Ready Oregon addresses immediate needs in a way that will strengthen our capacity to address the continuing need for education and retraining in the decades ahead.

## The Plan

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The \$200 million investment drawing from federal ARPA and General Fund resources is designed to be implemented in two phases.

1. Initial funding will immediately expand existing successful programs to provide education, training, and additional support services to Oregonians hurt by the pandemic. With these added resources, local Workforce Investment Boards, Community Colleges, and the Bureau of Labor and Industries all will be called on to ramp up services already in place.
2. Additional funding will be used to pursue new models of service delivery that bring together education and training, career counseling, and wraparound supports to meet the specific needs of underserved populations – people of color, rural Oregonians, veterans, incarcerated populations, young people disconnected from education, and Oregonians with low incomes. Funding will assist employer coalitions, community-based organizations, education and training providers, labor unions, and social service agencies to partner in developing new models of service delivery involving stronger outreach, better counseling, new curriculum models, including expanding apprenticeships, and stronger connections to high demand jobs. Dollars would be used flexibly to address a wide variety of challenges, including the need for job-ready supplies, housing, food, transportation, childcare, tuition, and textbooks.

The \$200 million investment would also:

- Place Benefits Navigators at one-stop WorkSource Centers and community-based organizations, helping clients better access available career-related services and supports.
- Establish industry consortia in key sectors such as construction, healthcare, and manufacturing to identify statewide workforce needs and credentials, informing diverse education and training curricula, and improving systems alignment.
- Enhance overall program design with ongoing evaluation to assess strategies and outcomes. This would enable Oregon's Workforce and Talent Development Board to shape a delivery system fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.