



Legislative Testimony

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

February 3, 2022

The Honorable Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

Subject: Senate Bill 1522

Chair Dembrow and members of the committee, my name is Kelly Raths, and I serve as Acting Assistant Director of the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) Correctional Services Division. I am providing testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 1522 to share the anticipated impacts of the bill.

What the Bill Does:

SB 1522 would require DOC to develop a plan by December 2022 for providing the equipment, infrastructure, and connectivity needed to provide adults in custody (AICs) at the Snake River Correctional Institution (SRCI) and Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) with internet access to education and vocation programs. It also requires DOC to have these services in place by September 2023.

Background and Impacts:

Six years ago, DOC established an internet access platform currently in use. It is known as the "AIC Network." DOC uses this network to provide AICs with internet access to some legal, General Equivalency Diploma, and English as a Second Language resources. This was a big success for the agency and provided an opportunity to validate an internal, secure, DOC-owned AIC internet. This network can only support 750 AIC users across the state – a volume DOC can fill with people currently accessing legal libraries and existing education programming. This system was at the end of its life cycle and new hardware was installed in July 2021 to extend the current capacity for another four to five years at most.

With the arrival of Pell Grant eligibility for individuals in custody starting in July 2023, the department and higher education partners are eager to implement access to online higher education. This is something DOC has been working toward for several years. It is also a recommendation of the Oregon Coalition for Higher Education in Prison (OCHEP) workgroup, which stemmed from the 2021 legislative session.

As enthusiastic as DOC is to implement online education, DOC lacks the staffing and equipment needed to have required online education services in place by the September 2023 deadline. DOC will need additional funding in three specific areas to make this a success. First, DOC will need hardware and other infrastructure to build and support new AIC online capacity and to

standup computer labs. Second, DOC's current information technology (IT) capacity is limited. Additional IT staff will be needed to build out the internet and provide, maintain, and audit equipment. This additional IT capacity will also be needed to assist with planning and vendor review by December 2022 and to complete the Department of Administration Services Enterprise Information Systems (EIS) review and approval process. Finally, administrative staff onsite at SRCI and CCCF will be needed to supervise online education computer labs, coordinate the addition of online courses, support student learning, and assist with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (commonly known as FAFSA).

Requested Action:

DOC fully supports providing access to online education opportunities for individuals in custody. To make such access a reality by the SB 1522 deadline, DOC must receive funding for the staffing and network resources identified to ensure internet access for higher education can be provided in these two facilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Submitted by:

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