



Youth 71:Five MINISTRIES

"Lord God, you are my hope. I have trusted you since I was young." Psalm 71:5 icb

February 17, 2023

Re: HB2722
To Whom it may concern,

The State of Oregon is facing a great many challenges today, challenges that may be as great as any we have ever faced. I would like to address two of those challenges.

1. "Opportunity Youth" is a term that is used to describe young people ages 14 – 24 who are disconnected from education and the workforce. I would add to this group high school youth who are on the edge of disconnecting from education and young people who work dead-end jobs that don't pay a living wage and lack opportunities for advancement. We have a lot of Opportunity Youth across the state.
2. "The Trades" (construction, fabrication, manufacturing, etc.) are starving for workers to fill a large void caused by the retirement of Baby Boomers and the COVID 19 Pandemic.

I personally have 20+ years experience as a chaplain in the juvenile justice system and in that role I've come to understand a great deal about Opportunity Youth. They are the focal point of my career. Many of these young people are trapped by a system that fails to meet their needs. Society has told them that they should "go back to school, get an education, go to college". As good as this advice is, it misses a critical truth for far too many; These young people, for a variety of reasons, don't fit in an academic setting.

For many years, educators and counselors stressed that college was the only option that really mattered for a high school graduate. The result was a lot of young people were never guided toward Trades that offer a good career and a good income, this helped starve the Trades of new people to fill the ranks as the older workers retired. In response to what has become a crisis, the State of Oregon is investing heavily in apprenticeship & pre-apprenticeship programs.

These programs, including 71Five VoTech, are engaging Opportunity Youth and providing meaningful career exploration and training to help launch them into careers and lives as productive citizens in our community. The problem comes with the 16 or 17 year old who has only a couple of high school credits and no real desire to attend school. These young people can join a pre-apprentice program and in a few weeks learn how to weld (or some other skill that requires power equipment). They get excited and see a path to a future but then reality strikes; due to state rules, they can't get a job and move forward in life until they are 18. This creates a vulnerable gap when any number of forces can derail the goals and dreams they formed in the program.

HB2722 can help with both of these problems. Young people who cannot or will not connect with education will have an opportunity to begin meaningful careers that interest them. Businesses will have a new pool of prospective employees to draw from. HB2722 is not a fix-all for these problems but it does provide an opportunity to lessen the strain that these problems bring on our state.

