

March 2, 2023

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am an elected member of the Chemeketa Community College Board of Education, representing parts of Marion and Linn counties. I am submitting this written testimony in strong support of SB 523.

States across the nation are realizing that empowering community colleges to offer applied bachelor's degrees is the answer to addressing local workforce gaps. They are more affordable to students and are structured with the working adult in mind. Community colleges design such programs in direct response to the needs expressed by business and industry in our communities, and in consideration of our most vulnerable students, who deserve every opportunity that other Oregon students have.

The hospitals in our region, from the large (like Salem Health) to the small (like Santiam Hospital), have told us that they desperately need more locally-trained, bachelor-prepared nurses. They are hungry for community colleges like Chemeketa to have RN-to-BSN programs because they know that our graduates are extremely well-prepared and that they tend to stay local in their careers, a common pattern with community college students across our country.

We have also heard from our nursing students, who say they cannot afford to pursue a BSN with the options that currently exist or they are not inclined to do so because it presents other challenges. It is said that the definition of insanity is to expect different results while continuing to do the same thing. In our current educational model in Oregon, students can get the BSN only by utilizing university options, and many RNs who are graduating from community colleges elect not to do so. And so we are at a standstill, unless we do something different. Taking the position that additional options are not a good idea – and particularly local ones that build upon the many very successful RN programs at the state's community colleges – defies logic, and it will not help our communities move forward.

I am hard-pressed to understand opposition to what our employers and workforce partners are asking of us, what our students clearly need, and what our community colleges are well-positioned to do. As such, I am asking for your support of SB 523. It will make a difference for students, for our communities, and for health care in Oregon.

Thank you for considering my testimony, and thank you for your service.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Hector", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ken Hector
Chemeketa Board of Education, Zone Four