



March 30, 2023

Senate Education Committee
Oregon State Legislature
Re: SB 270

I am writing in support of SB270 (and SBs 270 and 1082) in my role as Director of the University of Oregon's Prison Education Program, which is the largest of its kind in our state. Our program offers a range of opportunities – extending from college degrees to one-off lectures and activities, to as wide and large a portion of those incarcerated in Oregon's prisons as possible. Though completion of a college degree is not our sole objective, we do offer both a Bachelor's of Arts and a Bachelor's of Science degree for incarcerated individuals, and held our first diploma granting ceremony inside the Oregon State Penitentiary in 2017.

Our program offers college credit to anyone enrolled in our courses, not only those who have been formally admitted to the University of Oregon. To enroll in one of our classes – which we have offered at OSP, OSCI, CCCF, DRCI, and CRCI – one need only have graduated from high school or have earned a G.E.D. Incarcerated students who have earned college credit in our courses have successfully transferred those credits to Chemeketa Community College, Portland State University, and other schools, and we have collaborated with Chemeketa and built upon the A.A.O.T. degree that they offer in designing our B.A./B.S. programs. We believe that transfer of credit between institutions of Higher Education should be facilitated, and hope that an M.O.U. resulting from SB269 will move this process forward.

We hope for legislative support to:

- Expand existing programs and facilitate greater collaboration between programs, and appropriate additional funding for new and current institutional program development including equity for incarcerated women
- Foster collaboration on information sharing of opportunities for various kinds of education: non-credit, vocational, credit non-degree, and degree-granting opportunities
- Create a standing educational committee with membership including colleges/universities, the HECC, DOC, and re-entry service providers
- Address staffing, materials, technology, security, and space needs to accomplish these goals in both the DOC and the HECC

At this time is important to note both the opportunities and challenges that will come with renewed availability of Pell Grant funds, while adhering to the Federal Department of Education's directive that Pell Funding "supplement rather than supplant" existing funding for Higher Education in prisons. We also affirm the broad liberal arts approach to education in prisons that accords with the "career competencies" listed as most necessary by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

As documented in the Federal Register [DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 34 CFR Parts 600, 668, and 690 [Docket ID ED-2022-OPE-0062] RIN 1840-AD54, 1840-AD55, 1840-AD66, 1840-AD69], only two percent of those who are incarcerated in Federal and State prisons are participating in higher education. Research has shown that even basic participation in higher education by those in prisons has myriad benefits, including reduced recidivism, increased public safety, cost savings, and a more skilled workforce. We are eager to make educational opportunities more inclusive, extensive, and effective in our state's prisons, and SBs 269, 270, and 1082 are a step in the right direction.

We appreciate your attention to these matters, and are happy to provide any follow-up that will assist in pursuing these goals.

Sincerely,

Prof. Shaul Cohen
Director, UO Prison Education Program

PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM

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- Improve programs both on campus and in our communities to promote successful re-entry for those released from incarceration

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