



Oregon School Employees Association

www.osea.org

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House Committee on Higher Education
Rep. John Lively, chair

Chair Lively and committee members:

The Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) represents about 23,000 workers in nearly all levels of public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, ESDs, community colleges and special districts. OSEA members perform many of the essential tasks that keep Oregon public schools safe and functional for students, administrators and teachers.

OSEA supports the general policy direction of House Bill (HB) 3499 and appreciates Rep. Chaichi and her staff lifting up two important conversations in higher education: access and accountability. On behalf of our members and their families, we care about these issues from the perspective of higher education workers as well as the students of all ages trying to access higher education in Oregon.

HB 3499 most directly targets questions about funding and access, and fundamentally whether Oregon's public institutions of higher education exist as a public good. Direct state investment in educational institutions for Oregonians shouldn't leave them only available to those with financial means. The average wage for OSEA members is \$20,000-30,000 annually. The only way our members and their families are likely to access higher education is by accepting debilitating debt for the privilege. This is an incredible obstacle for some of the most dedicated public servants in Oregon's communities.

We believe that the current leadership of Oregon's institutions care about affordability and access, but they are reaching a crossroads in terms of meaningful access for all Oregonians. Without a course correction, Oregonians' chances of attending Oregon's colleges and universities will get even worse.

HB 3499 also highlights the need for increased levels of accountability for higher education institutions. Since the dissolution of the Oregon University System, we've seen universities increase focus on private investment and fundraising, and that kind of environment often struggles to provide essentials, including the ongoing cost of maintaining and operating facilities once built. We believe that the surest way to maximize access and value to Oregon students is drawing accountability and focus back to the state and Oregon taxpayers.

*The Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) is an affiliate of
the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the AFL-CIO.*





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Oregonians have a genuine, shared interest in quality higher education for our friends, neighbors and relatives. Together, our system of colleges and universities should be meeting the diverse needs of our state's future workers and employers. With a course correction like HB 3499, we can move seriously in that direction.

We recognize that such complicated conversations can't be rushed, especially because the conversations about how we best deliver quality higher education need to include the workers who directly support our students.

OSEA strongly encourages the Legislature to require ongoing discussion on this policy that includes participation from higher education workers and their representatives. Shifting the priorities of even one institution is a significant effort. Moving all of Oregon's colleges and universities in the right direction will take a lot of work. We know it will best be accomplished by inclusion of worker voices, both to promote the best decisions for moving forward and to increase engagement and investment by the workers we need to retain to make our colleges and universities successful now and in the future.

OSEA looks forward to collaborating with other stakeholders to advance the important priorities highlighted in HB 3499.

Thank you for your attention,

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