

Submitter: Jesse Longhurst
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Chair Steiner, Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee-

My name is Jesse Longhurst and I am an associate professor and Chair of the Department of Education at Southern Oregon at Southern Oregon University. I come to you with a broad background (professional, personal and research-based). I am a proud alumna of SOU and I know what a difference a quality regional university made to my life as a working-class, rural kid seeking an affordable and relevant education. In addition to my work as a faculty member, I am also a member of the Interinstitutional Faculty Senate and have served on several state level task forces concerning college affordability and educator workforce issues. I am also a recognized authority in the field of rural education research, so I am writing as someone who understands the larger picture and the associated challenges. I am personally and professionally deeply committed to the mission and vital importance of regional universities.

I am testifying today in support of \$1.05 billion appropriation for higher education in Oregon, and importantly the \$15 million dollar support fund for Oregon's Regional Universities and requested in the Governor's Budget.

Southern Oregon University provides life changing education opportunities to our region and our rural communities that often feel marginalized by state policies and funding priorities. I know many others will speak to the importance of Oregon's Regional Universities but I want to highlight the necessity of our institution to the entire education ecosystem of our region. We are the only teacher preparation program for 200 miles in any direction and our graduates are desperately needed in today's unprecedented teacher shortage.

Our department manages over a dozen programs that prepare educators to teach everything from special education to biology to early childhood education. We have seen our faculty reduced by 40% over the past five years and yet we still try to innovate, create new pathways for future educators and serve Southern Oregon's school districts and educational institutions. They need us and our graduates desperately. We have been doing more with less for years and the cracks are beginning to show!

Faculty at my institution, alongside fellow regional universities (EOU/OIT/ WOU) are united in our commitment to Oregon's future. I urgently ask that Oregon commit \$15 million dollars to supporting our Regional Universities.

Sincerely,
Jesse Longhurst, PhD