

Good morning, Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, and members of the committee, for the record my name is Thomas McGregor and I serve as the Executive Director of the Phoenix School of Roseburg. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. I will keep my comments brief.

Founded in 1981, Phoenix School of Roseburg serves ten various communities in Douglas County as a hub for youth re-engagement and workforce training. Since the early 1990's, we have delivered workforce and education programming as an early Oregon Youth Conservation Corps provider. Today, Phoenix School continues to operate an Oregon Youth Corps program, as well as an Oregon Conservation Corps program, while also partnering with the Southwest Oregon Workforce Investment Board to manage Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act employment placements for youth and adults.

I believe the recent investment in OCC has greatly assisted the Douglas community in three immediate modes. One, it has assisted in pulling more funds to workforce training from federal sources like the Bureau of Land Management and US Forest Service. OCC capacity has allowed for more full-time leadership staff to be hired year-round at Phoenix resulting in a sustained ability to expand programming available for local youth on other natural resources and forestry type projects for the public land management agencies. Simply put, the strong OCC investment from Salem allows for strong local programs to be able to create further strong results in our local communities. The second mode is that the OCC program has provided a key gateway for increasing the availability of local wildland firefighter recruits. Our partner, the Umpqua National Forest, reported to us that recently they had an expanded ability via the Biden administration to hire more firefighters on local engine crews, but unfortunately, minimal applicants applied last summer and new spots went unfilled. We are proud of our OCC program's inaugural season resulting in directly trained and referred youth to these spots and other private crew providers in recent months. Local youth are making the difference for fire preparedness in rural Oregon.

Finally, the third mode of assistance in our community via OCC can be highlighted via a snapshot of the day to day here at our campus in east Roseburg. Our charter high school sources graduating OYC program members to the OCC fuels reduction program where youth are preparing for this summer's wildfire season. Our in-house, workforce-board funded employment coaches case manage many of these placements and have provided appropriate clothing such as these youth's first pair of 'corks'. We also have individuals new to our agency as adults. Individuals literally living on the street have been welcomed into our doors, joined the workforce training program, enlisted in the Conservation Corps, received case management to housing services with sister organizations and now are excited again for their future. One municipal audit, one insurance policy, one admin team, one board of directors, etc. for Phoenix oversees this incredible blending and braiding of resources. We believe for the Douglas Community this saves time, resources, and mobilizes innovation further and faster. The OCC program, OYC program, and the workforce training alignment and coordination of these incredible programs by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission are the backbone for this new ability for rural Oregon to determine solutions for its future.

Looking ahead, Oregon's communities are recovering from the pandemic and the investments from Salem have made positive impacts. In conclusion, my goal in sharing these modes of change and examples has been to highlight in action the Oregon Youth Works program at the HECC and how it is building capacity in local community-based organizations and achieving tremendous gains for rural Oregon communities. Thank you for your time today.