

Submitter: Merrilyne Lundahl
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

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

Thank you for your work on this committee and for the opportunity to comment. My name is Merrilyne Lundahl and I am an associate professor in the English program at Southern Oregon University. I also co-direct the Oregon Writing Project, a site of the National Writing Project and devoted to supporting teachers and improving literacy preK-16, and I am a liaison with Advanced Southern Credit, a dual-credit program that encourages high school students to get college credit. I am providing this written testimony 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 requested in the Governor's Budget.

Southern Oregon University provides educational opportunities that benefit our region and our rural communities. My position and the program that houses it is instrumental not only in supporting current students who seek to be capable and engaged citizens, but teaching professionals already in their careers who seek continuing professional development, particularly related to teaching writing and improving access and belonging for all students.

Presently, Oregon's regional universities are suffering from catastrophic funding shortfalls, causing losses of faculty and staff positions. Cuts like these are more than demoralizing; they hamstringing us – our program offerings shrink while faculty and staff are called upon to do more and more, often taking on courses and administrative duties far beyond our expertise. I am teaching my 20th new course preparation since coming to SOU seven years ago – and teaching courses across so many subdisciplines dilutes their quality. In the face of losing faculty colleagues, I scramble to cover and update courses, to find relevant materials, and just to get up to date within the field. Students have a right to greater expertise. Beyond the demands and limitations that come from so much teaching outside of my areas, it feels impossible to get support in seeking and managing grants, getting institutional review board approval for research projects, and myriad other complicated processes – and yet it is the work of research that enables me to maintain expertise, and getting grants enables work that serves the broader community. As a mid-career professional, it feels like I have to constantly make a choice between my survival and my institution's.

With additional funding, we can secure and maintain faculty and frontline service jobs at our institutions, increase service levels that promote student success, and promote

sustainable growth for our institutions. Our students' success—and I include primary and secondary students who require excellent teachers and teacher educators like me, depends on strong funding right now.

Faculty at SOU, alongside fellow regional universities EOU, OIT, and 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,
Merrilyne Lundahl