

Submitter: Debra Mason

On Behalf Of: HB5025

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education

Measure: HB5025

Dear Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, and Members of the Committee, I support Oregon House Bill 5025, which aims to increase funding for our community colleges.

We are requesting \$855 million in ongoing funding and \$50 million in one-time funding for the 2023-2025 biennium. While this falls short of the 44 percent increase needed to fully maintain current services and capacity, it provides a vital funding base that will enable our colleges to continue many critical programs and services, meeting the changing demands of students, communities, and local economies.

Community colleges are essential in serving students at all education and skill levels, especially those facing significant barriers to attaining post-secondary education and training. Nationwide, the pandemic caused the greatest enrollment declines in open-access institutions like community colleges, which predominantly serve the populations most disrupted by the crisis. As a result, educational and economic inequities have increased, making it crucial that our colleges have the capacity to re-engage these learners.

Federal relief dollars have helped colleges cope with the significant declines in tuition revenue resulting from pandemic shutdowns, but that support has now ended, and colleges face a fiscal cliff. At the same time, demand for mental health and wrap-around services has increased significantly. As enrollment begins to stabilize and even increase in many institutions, it is more important than ever that we maintain capacity in critical programs.

The HECC's recommended investment level would help colleges continue to provide essential career and technical education programs, as well as short-term career certificate programs, which have seen growing enrollment in recent years. These programs are vital in preparing our workforce for the future, particularly as baby boomers retire and employers struggle to find trained workers.

If unemployment increases, our community colleges will be at the forefront of helping workers retrain and re-enter the workforce. The \$855 million in ongoing funding will assist colleges in covering cost increases for the next biennium, while the \$50 million in one-time funding will help provide bridge funding as we make necessary reductions.

In conclusion, I urge you to support House Bill 5025 and invest in the future of Oregon's students, workforce, and economy by providing much-needed funding for our community colleges. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Debra Mason