

April 24, 2023

Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and members of the House Committee on Higher Education,

We the undersigned constitute the Board of Education for Chemeketa Community College. Each of us represents one of seven zones in the 2,600-square mile service district of the college in Marion, Polk, Yamhill and a portion of Linn counties. We are submitting this written testimony in strong support of SB 523.

We have been advocating for the ability of community colleges to offer and confer the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree since 2018. We have been told that it was with the BSN in mind that Senators Courtney and Girod sponsored and effectively helped pass SB 3 in 2019, empowering community colleges in our state, as in 26 other states, to offer applied baccalaureate (BAS) degrees. It was not clear to many at that time that a BAS in Nursing is not an industry-recognized credential, the consequence of which is that graduates with that degree will have difficulty gaining employment and will not be able to continue onto graduate-level nursing degrees. Ironically, the BSN *is* an applied baccalaureate degree (although BSN does not contain the word “applied” in its title), with 1) an applied lower-division component (the 2-year Associate Degree in Nursing which, if a student passes the national nursing exam, results in licensure as an RN nurse) and 2) upper-division lecture-type courses. So, in essence, what all of us in support of SB 523 are advocating for is what community colleges in Oregon are already authorized to do in terms of content, organization, and approach through SB 3, but with a degree name that needs to be changed in order for the degree to be useful for our students and health care partners who are in desperate need of BSN-prepared nurses. SB 523 will correct this seemingly superficial but clearly impactful component of the degree so that the intent of SB 3 can be realized in the realm of nursing.

SB 523 is important to pass because evidence shows that increasing the proportion of bachelor-prepared nurses is better for nurses, creates better health outcomes for patients, and meets a pressing workforce need. Sixteen of all 17 of Oregon’s community colleges across our state generate RN nurses (the 17th is building a program now) and, while some go on to obtain their BSN, a great many do not, regardless of existing transfer arrangements. Reasons for this include the significant cost at the university level, concerns with learning primarily in an online or remote modality (unless a student were to actually physically relocate – a huge and impractical undertaking for many), and, especially for our diverse and marginalized students, the disinclination to enroll, navigate, and attend in a new, unknown university environment. Over half of Chemeketa’s nursing graduates do not progress to the BSN level. Of those RN graduates across the state who do pursue the BSN, many opt for out-of-state, online options that are less expensive than university programs in Oregon. Western Governors University is a common choice, even for those students who are attending community college programs that

utilize the OCNE curriculum that creates a direct pathway for transfer to OHSU. This means that our students' dollars are going out of state because in-state options are less attractive.

SB 523 will address exactly these issues. If Chemeketa and other community colleges were able to offer the RN-to-BSN, it would provide a valuable local option to RN graduates. This would allow them to continue to work with known faculty, continue in a familiar learning environment, continue with their student support resources, and – critically – be offered a more affordable career pathway than what currently exists.

Chemeketa's president has met with the CEOs of all four major hospitals in our service district, and they have all indicated strong local support for this bill. A number of those CEOs/CNOs are providing written or live testimony in support. The executive director of our workforce board (Willamette Workforce Partnership) is also providing testimony in support. SB 523 is good for our region because it will generate more BSN-prepared nurses and, because community college graduates overwhelmingly tend to stay in the region after their educational experience, those BSNs are likely to have careers that support our local healthcare providers and benefit our local communities into the future.

For all these reasons, we urge you to support SB 523. It will provide tremendous opportunities for our nursing students and benefit our local workforce significantly.

Thank you for considering our testimony, and thank you for your service.

Respectfully submitted,

The Chemeketa Community College Board of Education

Ron Pittman, Chair  
Zone Two



Neva Hutchinson, Vice-Chair  
Zone Three



Ed Dodson  
Zone One



Ken Hector  
Zone Four

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Hector". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

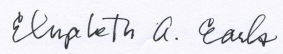
Jackie Franke  
Zone Five

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jackie Franke". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Diane Watson  
Zone Six

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane Watson". The signature is cursive and clearly legible.

Betsy Earls  
Zone Seven

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betsy A. Earls". The signature is cursive and is set against a light blue rectangular background.