

Submitter: Chloe Hughes
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Dear Chair Steiner, Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee,

I wish to provide 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 as requested in the Governor's Budget.

As you may know, state appropriations for higher education have steadily declined over the last two decades, causing tuition and fees to skyrocket. Oregon is now 45th in the nation for per student state appropriations for higher education.

Oregon's Regional Universities are known for preparing students for vocational professions – educators, mental health counselors, community health workers, nurses, social workers, etc. These occupations have soaring vacancy rates in Oregon, making it impossible to deliver critical services across the state. Oregon's aging population means such workforce shortages will only get worse.

I am a Professor of Teacher Education at Western Oregon University (WOU); an institution that provides life-changing education opportunities to historically and currently underserved students that has suffered from catastrophic funding shortfalls. Permanent budget cuts have already caused multiple layoffs of essential faculty and staff, allowing us only to operate at reduced levels that harm our ability to serve students and ensure their wellbeing and success. Notably, our Student Health and Counseling Center has been reduced to a skeleton staff at the same time as the demand for services has risen exponentially.

WOU is now implementing a ruinous \$5 million budget cut that will cause further harm. The cuts will continue without your support. However, with additional funding, we can secure faculty and frontline service jobs, provide the wrap-around services that our students need and deserve, and promote sustainable growth for our institutions. Our students' success depends on funding!

Regionals are the economic engines in our communities because of our workforce and educational opportunities. Our state is made better by robust support by the State of Oregon. I urgently ask that you support the Governor's budget for higher education in Oregon.

Thank you for your service to Oregon.

Sincerely,

Chloë Hughes, Ph.D.
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Western Oregon University