

Maureen Wright
Testimony House Bill (HB) 4125
February 5, 2024

To: House Committee on Higher Education.

I ask for your vote in favor of House Bill (HB) 4125.

Accountability, transparency, accessibility, and fiscal responsibility require more direct-public involvement. Elected boards make that happen. Decentralized representation promotes innovations, responsiveness, and vibrancy. We the public invest in higher education through our taxes and private donations. Similarly, we invest in public education as consumers.

The public clamors to be heard through increasing decentralized governmental bodies. In that spirit, for example, the City of Portland increased the number of smaller districts that elect decentralized representatives.

As a concerned voter, as a faculty member at a public community college, and former Portland State University (PSU) undergraduate, from experience, I know the benefits of elected boards of directors for all institutions of higher education.

In service to the public good, HB 4125 provides for a study that can ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the checks and balances necessary to achieve Oregon's commitments. HB 4125 supports the interests, needs and goals of the electorate, the Oregon Legislature, students, and employers. Reviewing alternative governing structures promotes informed decision-making and better long-term planning.

A destructive myth exists that independent governance leads to unnecessary competition between institutions. On the contrary, independent representative governance leads to increasing opportunities for innovations, responsiveness, and agility. Decentralization adds greater opportunities to a larger number of involved contributors. Different constituencies invest their unique resources to experiment with fresh ideas and diverse methods. Sometimes, that means increased in-kind or monetary contributions from advocates for change.

During recent congressional hearings, from the elite presidents of Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the public saw the folly of overly centralized management. Centralized management can cause the "leadership" to lose touch with their supporters and the public good. Decentralized management helps to prevent that. HB 4125 will complete a study to consider all angles of how our current system is meeting our goals.

Thank you for your favorable consideration of House Bill (HB) 4125.

Maureen Wright