

February 11th, 2025

Senate Committee on Education
Oregon State Legislature
RE: Senate Bill 478

Dear Senate Education Committee Members:

My name is Kristin Adams and I am a current member and past board chair of the Linn Benton Community College Board of Education. I am writing to express my opposition of Senate Bill (SB) 478 for reasons listed below.

Student Voting Member

SB 478 would mandate each community college to have a voting member (student) who was exempt from the same electoral process that I and all my fellow board members went through. This is highly inconsistent with democratically elected governance and there is no such state mandate for any other elected governing bodies in Oregon. Additionally, elected officials represent the zone in which their constituents reside. This brings a healthy balance to the board, offering a variety of perspectives from citizens whose property taxes support the college. Students do not always live within the college's operating boundaries, may not pay property taxes that are supporting the institution or may not be familiar enough with local industry that drives the academic structure of the school.

Boards of education do want to hear from students. Their voice is important to our policy governance and school administrative systems are in place for students to express themselves. At Linn-Benton, the Student Leadership Council (SLC) ensures every student's voice is heard in college policies and decisions. The SLC President has a spot at the table each board meeting, providing an official voice through which the opinion of the student body is expressed. Our college also conducts an annual student survey for students to share their thoughts and most importantly, our President has consistent meetings with the SLC and an open door policy for any student.

Board Stipend

SB 478 opens the door to pay board members a significant stipend of \$500/month. This is an additional annual expense of \$42,000 for every community college. At a time when colleges are struggling to rebound post-pandemic enrollment, balance expenses with limited state funding and keep tuition increases low, the suggestion for an added expense is an unnecessary burden placed on college budgets.

Policy vs Operations

As a board chairman for three years, I worked tirelessly to engage fellow board members in appropriate conversations related to board policy and student success without getting into the weeds of college operations. SB 478 mandates board approval for a college to become a member of any state or national association. This is an operational decision and a deterrent from the purpose of boards of education.

Community colleges' boards of education are successful because each member represents the values and priorities of the communities in which we serve. We participate in elections with no monetary incentive because of our desire to serve and support economic growth within our townships. And lastly, we understand that our governance centers on policy, not operational needs. I respectfully urge the Committee to reject SB 478.

Kristin J. Adams

Sweet Home, OR