

Submitter: Jessica Engelke
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB478

Testimony on SB 478 – Local Elected Official

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am the Mayor of North Bend, Oregon. I strongly oppose SB 478 because it undermines the democratic principles that form the foundation of our local governance.

As an elected official, I know firsthand the responsibility we carry to represent and be accountable to the people who voted us into office. Every position on the city council, county commission, school board, and even this legislature is determined through a fair and open election. That is how democracy works—through the will of the voters.

SB 478 disrupts that democratic process by imposing an unelected, voting board member onto community college boards. This is a dangerous overreach and sets a precedent that should concern every elected body in Oregon. If we allow a system where board members can be appointed without voter approval, where does it end? Who decides when and where democracy applies?

I want to be clear—I value student voices in the decision-making process, just as I value public input in city governance. There are already multiple ways for students to engage, provide feedback, and even run for a board seat themselves. But giving a vote to someone who does not answer to the electorate is not just undemocratic—it is fundamentally unfair to the people who trust in their right to choose their representatives.

Beyond the democratic concerns, SB 478 also creates practical governance challenges. Adding an eighth voting member increases the risk of tie votes, making it harder for boards to function efficiently. Additionally, requiring boards to vote on every statewide or national association they join is unnecessary legislative micromanagement that no other local governing body in Oregon is subjected to.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to reject SB 478. We cannot compromise the principles of representative democracy.

Mayor Jessica Engelke
North Bend, Oregon