

Submitter: Keely O'Brien

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce
Development

Measure, Appointment or
Topic: HB3552

Honorable Chair and distinguished members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 3352, which aims to establish regional career centers to better serve the educational and workforce needs of Oregon's students. I am Keely O'Brien, founder and owner of O'Brien Construction, specializing in creating places that people love, specializing in wineries, breweries, hotels, restaurants, schools, and event venues. Notable projects range from the Seaside Convention Center to Portland's favorite ice cream shops Salt and Straw. O'Brien has been a growing construction firm in Oregon for the past 14 years and we see first hand the opportunities and challenges in recruiting, training and retaining a skilled workforce. This bill is not just a step forward for education; it's an essential bridge to a brighter future for our economy, our communities, and Oregon's diverse industries.

As we all know, the construction industry, among other sectors, faces a critical shortage of skilled laborers. Whether it's electricians, plumbers, carpenters, or HVAC technicians, we are witnessing firsthand how this labor gap is stalling our progress and impeding Oregon's economic growth. This shortage is particularly acute in the trades and technical sectors, where skilled workers are essential not only to the success of individual projects but to the future of our infrastructure.

That's where this bill comes into play. By establishing regional career centers, we can directly address this gap by giving students the tools and training they need to succeed in high-demand, high-wage careers right here in Oregon. These centers will not only enhance career and technical education (CTE) but will also create strong partnerships between schools, local industries, and community organizations.

From a private industry perspective, the benefits are clear. This bill encourages collaboration with local workforce development boards, businesses, and educational institutions. It ensures that training aligns with the specific needs of the industries that drive our economy. By working together, we will create a pipeline of skilled workers ready to meet the growing demand in the construction industry and beyond.

Furthermore, this partnership will have a ripple effect throughout our communities. Not only will it provide students with the practical skills they need to secure meaningful employment, but it will also encourage local investment in education. When businesses partner with schools, it builds stronger connections to the

community, boosts the local economy, and ensures that our young people have the opportunity to thrive within their own regions.

For us in the construction industry, this bill is an investment in the workforce of tomorrow. It offers an opportunity to mentor and guide students towards the rewarding careers we know they are capable of achieving. And it is an investment in Oregon itself—creating jobs, fostering economic growth, and ensuring that we are building the infrastructure of the future with a highly-skilled, capable workforce.

In closing, House Bill 3352 is an essential step toward addressing the skilled labor shortage in Oregon's construction industry and many other sectors. It will equip students with the education and experience they need, help businesses find the skilled workers they rely on, and make a positive, lasting impact on our communities. I urge you to support this bill and help create a workforce that will propel Oregon to new heights of prosperity.

Thank you for your efforts and consideration.