



ROSEBURG URBAN SANITARY AUTHORITY

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March 3, 2025

Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Fragala and Harbick

Members of the House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee

Oregon State Capitol

900 Court Street NE

Salem OR, 97301

Chair Hudson, and Members of the Committee:

I am Jim Baird, the General Manager for Roseburg Urban Sanitary Authority. I would like to express my support for HB 3634 and thank the sponsors for introducing and hearing this very important bill. I would like to provide a little background and make a few suggestions that I believe will improve the intent and outcomes of this proposal. The 2024 Interagency Water Workforce Working Group Report to Congress highlighted the critical state of the Water Workforce "A major challenge facing our nation is the likely potential for a staff shortage in the water workforce that operates and maintains our essential drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. In the next five to 10 years, water sector workers will be eligible to retire at levels that would stress the Nation's ability to operate this critical infrastructure. The clean and safe water and the way of life we have come to enjoy in this country cannot be sustained without our water protection specialists." The report went on to state "The number of workers in the United States water workforce is declining. According to the Brookings Institute, roughly one-third of water and wastewater treatment plant and system operators were reported to be 55 years old or older in 2021 (Kane, 2022).

The need for a program to provide for the recruitment, training and retention of Water Professionals is essential to provide clean water, safe and healthy communities in Oregon. The bill provides structure and funding for Local Development Boards to provide funds for programs to meet the need to train water professionals. What I believe is lacking is recognition of our Community College System that provide several workforce development programs and two (Clackamas Community College and Umpqua Community College) that currently provide one year certificate and Associate in Applied Science programs in Water and Environmental Technology. Both programs have been approved by the Oregon Health Authority and the Department of Environmental Quality as Operator in Training Programs.

I would respectfully ask that the bill be amended to include Community Colleges that have or develop Water and Environmental Technology Programs (WET) be able to apply for funds directly to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to support these proven programs. I would also ask that the funds be available to High Schools in Oregon in the form of tuition reimbursements to register high school students in Community College Water and Environmental Technology programs.

The Community College System is well established with 17 community colleges across the state. The community colleges programs reach the majority of counties in the state and provide outreach to those counties not included in their boundary. The two community colleges in the state currently with WET programs can partner with community colleges across the state to offer these programs through joint agreements. With the educational system in place and the support mechanisms available I believe that including Community Colleges as another method of funding these programs directly would streamline the program and ensure that the availability of support to the next generation of Water Professionals is implemented statewide.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions.

Sincerely,

Jim Baird

Jim Baird

General Manager

Roseburg Urban Sanitary Authority