

Southern OREGON UNIVERSITY

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

TESTIMONY OFFERED ON HB 2485

Offered by Marc Overbeck, Director of Government Relations

Good morning, Chair Hudson, Vice Chair Fragala, Vice Chair Harbick, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Marc Overbeck, and I'm the Director of Government Relations at Southern Oregon University. I want to start by offering our thanks to Representative Evans for introducing this bill.

We recognize that many of the asks of the Legislature are around funding. And yes, it does cost more to deliver a university education today than it did 10 years ago, both because student needs are greater, but also because of mandatory salary increases, the cost of health care coverage and retirement benefits.

Happily, I am not coming today with a bill asking you for additional funding. Rather, we are asking for your support to help us be more efficient with the money that you already do send us. There are currently over 150 mandates that each public university must comply with—some requiring multiple reports to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission; and some universities have even more reports that apply to their specific institution.

This, in addition to more than 400 federal mandates imposed on public universities.

Just as tax credits are required to undergo review on a periodic basis, we believe that the time has come for a review of the reporting burdens that fall on universities. How many of these reports are reviewed by the HECC—or the Legislature itself? What are the substantive actions that the HECC has taken based on these reports? Do they all make a difference? Or, are universities required to create reports that were prescribed 10 years ago or more that simply sit on a shelf?

Let me be clear: Oregon's public universities are committed to being accountable for the public investment into our institutions. We are committed to excellence, and offering a place where every student feels welcomed, valued, and has the opportunity to succeed.

But with regulatory burden increasing over time from the state level – and an uncertain future for public higher education at the federal level, we think it's possible that the state could do more to reduce redundant reporting and mandates that have outlived their usefulness.

As a former State of Oregon employee for more than 28 years, I'm clear that if the Legislature proposed a agency to develop a new report, the agency would ask for an additional \$200,000 - \$500,000, and somewhere between a half an FTE up to perhaps 2 to do the work. We don't have that luxury in the public university space.

In fact, over the past 3 years, my university eliminated 83 full-time equivalent positions, including 27 faculty, 30 classified staff and 25 unclassified roles, and 2 vice president positions. That's not

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simply staff leaving and being replaced; that's a reduction in force. We made these painful decisions in light of new realities and structural issues—some of which needed to be addressed to be able to get the university on a sustainable financial footing. And we are committed to getting there. But, please don't ask us to do more with so much less, if it is not making a difference for the students we are committed to serve. The future leaders of Oregon, the future workers, entrepreneurs, filmmakers, health care providers, small business owners—that's who we are in service of.

We are aware that, in response to this bill, HECC has submitted written testimony acknowledging that there may be both outdated and duplicative reporting requirements that universities are required to meet. And, that such requirements are, in their words "significant drivers of time and cost." We appreciate the HECC's willingness to work with public universities to review reporting requirements currently imposed on universities.

HB 2458 calls for an inventory of reporting requirements and a plan by HECC to reduce the burden placed by unneeded or duplicative reporting by September 2026. We believe is a reasonable time frame to complete this work and should be able to be done within existing resources.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.