

Joint Ways and Means Committee Testimony

April 4th, 2025, Warm Springs Elementary

Co-chair Lieber, Co-Chair Sanchez, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening. My name is Melanie Widmer and I am a member of the OSU-Cascades Advocacy and Advisory Board. I am here to speak in support of OSU-Cascades' capital request for \$42M in state-paid bonds to match \$22M from the university and \$20M support by fee revenues that students voted for in 2017.

As a 2018 graduate of OSU-Cascades, I myself paid fees to support this project. I started in 2014 before there was any campus at all, and the university was co-located with COCC. But, gradually our fledgling campus has grown and strives to meet a growing need. The OSU-Cascades I attended had very limited facilities, but I could envision how future expansion would benefit the generations of students that would come after me.

The project will reclaim and develop 24 acres of land from a demolition landfill and pumice mine, completing a 100-acre academic campus to support over a decade of campus growth. The funding will also build a 40,000 sq. ft. Student Health and Recreation Center with spaces for clinical health, mental health counseling, and physical activity. OSU will separately fund and build a new student housing project (about \$39.5M) to provide more accessible and affordable housing options for students.

Central Oregon has, until recently, been a higher education desert. Our region did not have access to any college beyond the community college level, and we still have a lot of catching up to do. OSU-Cascades is the only public university in Oregon without a student health and recreation center. Holistic student health is not an amenity...it is essential to student success through improved retention, academic progress, and degree completion. I urge you to support this critical investment for students and economic growth in Central Oregon. Thank you.