

Submitter: Emily Plec

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education

Measure, Appointment or
Topic: SB5525

Esteemed Senators and Representatives,

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission is the last vestige of what was once a public university system that served the state and Oregon students by centralizing some services and coordinating others. It houses the most intimate knowledge of the big picture of higher education in Oregon. I know this because I was a trustee of that system when it was dissolved and the HECC first created. Whatever other changes have come to pass in the decade-plus since its formation, the HECC is the one entity that provides the coordinating services so needed in order to serve those students and broader state interests.

I now focus much of my service time, when not teaching and researching and serving on committees, running a program for students who have experienced foster care. Most of these students are not beneficiaries of the financial support that exists for youth who are still wards of the state. Most were adopted, or aged out, or were in care in another state, or returned to their biological family, for better or worse. All have experienced trauma, all chose a small regional university (WOU), and all have ambitions that far exceed the statistical, national likelihood that they will complete their degrees. Yet each year several of them do. They become accountants, coaches, orthodontists, managers, social workers and lab techs. One is probably going to be your colleague in the legislature in short order, if I were to hazard a guess. She graduated a couple years ago and is currently drafting state and federal legislation to mitigate against youth homelessness. That kind of success doesn't happen without state investment, without a budget that doesn't just allow universities to deliver the bare minimum but shows a real investment in Oregon's future. When the resources aren't there to support our institutions, programs like mine lose out in the long run. When education is affordable and accessible and designed to help our citizens succeed, everybody wins.

Thank you,
Emily Plec