

May 2, 2025

The Honorable Fred Girod
Co-chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction
900 Court St. NE, S-323, Salem, Oregon 97301

The Honorable Rob Nosse
Co-chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction
900 Court St. NE, H-277, Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Senator Girod and Representative Nosse:

My name is Erica Skatvold, and I am currently a member of the Oregon State University-Cascades Advisory and Advocacy Board as well as a Central Oregon Community College (COCC) Board Member. I write to urge your support for Oregon State University-Cascades' request for state funding for a Student Health and Recreation Center and land reclamation.

I know firsthand how important higher education is for Central Oregon. Growing up here, our community college directly contributed to my ability to ultimately achieve my educational journey, however my options beyond community college were very limited in the early 2000's. This led me and my peers to either not pursue this level of education or move away for opportunities. Many of those who moved away never returned. To have robust offerings and a complete campus with OSU-Casacades in Central Oregon will allow those who are raised in, and connected to, the community to stay here to continue to help it develop and thrive. The world and economy are changing. Any assumptions that communities east of the Cascades will be fine without full academic opportunities and services is neglecting to recognize the constituent and economic needs on this side of the state. Our communities need to have a pathway to improve their lives through education while receiving vital non-academic needs support if we want our state and economy to continue to grow and remain viable.

OSU-Cascades is the only public university in Oregon without a student health and recreation center. The facility will provide dedicated space to students for mental health counseling, clinical health services, and exercise and recreation facilities. **Holistic student health is not an amenity**—it is essential to student success through improved retention, academic progress, and degree completion.

The \$42M state funding request will match \$22M from the university and \$20M paid by student fees. Students feel so passionately about the need for the facility that they voted to approve these fees and have been contributing into the fund since 2017. This project is pivotal not only for the success of OSU-Cascades but for the continued growth of our region's economy and workforce.

The project will also reclaim and develop 24 acres of land from a former demolition landfill and pumice mine, completing a 100-acre academic campus to support over a decade of campus growth, including an OSU-funded student housing project to provide more accessible and affordable housing for students in Central Oregon. Already, existing on-campus student housing capacity falls short of actual demand. The growth of the campus is essential to the economic growth of Central Oregon.

Central Oregon's rapid population growth and evolving economy demand access to higher education. OSU-Cascades provides an invaluable resource for local students, making higher education more accessible to families in the region. Currently, 53% of Oregon students are from the 3-county area, 24% are first-generation college students, 29% have high financial need, and 23% are U.S. minorities. Regional access is what makes college attainment possible for many.

OSU-Cascades has built degree offerings to supply workforce needs for Central Oregon and Oregon in critical industries. Already, more than 5,600 graduates are contributing in critical fields such as engineering, outdoor products, counseling, and physical therapy.

The campus also contributes to Central Oregon's economic prosperity. A new report estimates that OSU-Cascades generated \$89.9M in statewide economic impact in 2024 through both direct and indirect contributions, supported over 700 jobs, and provided over \$6.6M in state and local tax revenues.

I urge you to support this critical investment for students and economic growth in Central Oregon.

Sincerely yours,

Erica Skatvold