

Written Testimony for House Committee on Education February 4, 2026  
HB 4124

Dear Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair McIntire, Vice-Chair Dobson and members of the Committee,

My name is Dyana Mason, and I am an Associate Professor in the School of Planning, Public Policy and Management at the University of Oregon. I am also currently serving as the President of the University of Oregon Senate, which is a representative body of elected faculty, staff and students. The UO Senate participates in shared governance through our oversight of the university's academic mission. This is clear in the UO Constitution, which guides our responsibilities and activities. To do this, we have committees that work in collaboration with UO staff and academic leadership on everything from student petitions, course and curriculum development and approval, university policies for faculty and students, reviewing cases for tenure and promotion, and advising the President and Provost on academic matters.

We take our responsibilities in shared governance of the University seriously, and that is why I am testifying before you today.

Recently, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, published a report titled "Spending and Efficiency in Oregon Public Universities." I understand that some of the recommendations from the report were included in HB 4124, which is under consideration today.

I personally appreciate the drafters' recognition that each of our universities serves different communities with different needs, and we support the idea that we should better understand how our higher education system is meeting the needs of our students and state.

My testimony today is to raise some concerns we have regarding HB 4124, as it's currently written, and urge some changes before you move it forward.

First, the legislation states that the Higher Education Coordinating Committee "shall consult public institutions of higher education, including faculty, staff and students, and any other interested stakeholders identified by the commission." Any effort to understand our higher education system in Oregon should be conducted in partnership with our colleges and universities, not merely in consultation with them. As someone who is personally engaged in shared governance – the list of "interested stakeholders" is long, diverse and dynamic. The level, quality or criteria of consultation is not defined in the

legislation, which has the potential for study staff to not engage meaningfully with campus stakeholders.

Second, the legislation requires that the proposed study – probably the most intensive study ever done of Oregon’s system of higher education -- be completed by December 1, 2026. With Oregon’s public higher education system comprised of 17 community colleges and seven four-year universities – it seems difficult to imagine that it is possible to complete a comprehensive and effective review of 24 different agencies, each with thousands of employees and students, hundreds of degree programs, research endeavors and community engagement activities, in six to nine months. This is particularly problematic if HECC staff are expected to evaluate: “key variables such as research, public services, instruction, academic programming, educational model and the student population served”.

Oregon’s Secretary of State, which oversees state agency performance audits, often takes a year to review and provide recommendations for a single agency. Our institutions of higher education deserve similar care and attention. If the legislature expects a thorough and comprehensive review, rather than scraping available data from public sources (which can be problematic, as researchers know), you may consider expanding the timeframe to avoid the risk of utilizing misleading, inaccurate or incomplete data.

Third, we are concerned about the call for recommendations for “collaboration, restructuring and integration,” including duplication of programs or courses in Oregon’s higher education system. This should not be done without significant attention to student needs, workforce development, economic impact on Oregon communities, access to students from all backgrounds, and for the UO specifically, our standing as a Research 1 University that employs world-class scholars and engages in impactful research.

Fourth, the bill suggests developing recommendations for both program development as well as eliminating program redundancies across our university system. These decisions strike at the core of our academic mission, not merely an administrative exercise, where our faculty are responsible for developing programs to meet emerging knowledge, best pedagogical practices and student needs. These standards aren’t just set by faculty – but by our accrediting bodies for our regional accreditors, our disciplinary fields, and our own internal reviews and revisions.

For example, my own program at UO recently completed its decennial review with the University, a year-long program to review our learning outcomes and student success. The program I lead, our Master’s in Nonprofit Management, will be up for review and re-accreditation by the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council in the next couple of years. Our

Master's of Public Administration and Master's of Community and Regional Planning also undergo rigorous and regular review as part of their re-accreditation processes. These reviews include emerging trends related to skills and competencies necessary for our student's professional development and career readiness, as well as our student's success in finding employment post-graduation.

In addition, in the UO Senate, we are developing new processes in partnership with the Provost's office, to be able to review and provide feedback when academic leadership, made up of our Deans and others in the Office of the Provost, plan to make program cuts. All of these reviews shape our strategic plans, institutional hiring plans for new faculty and staff, and student recruitment. Any decisions regarding changing or eliminating programs will need to take all of these variables and voices into account.

In our view, these decisions are best left to those that have expertise in the field being studied, as well as each University's academic leadership team and Board of Trustees, as we respond to our own budgets, emerging fields of interest, and student needs.

Lastly, the bill does not do anything to study or make recommendations about what the appropriate investment from the state should be to help lower costs for students and stabilize our campus communities. National data shows that Oregon ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation in per student funding for its public universities. Without attention to the systemic issues facing state investment and UO's responsibilities to the state supporting higher education in Oregon, any study to find "efficiencies" won't be able to address the core issues related to budgetary constraints. In that case, we risk circling the drain, rather than looking for innovative opportunities to make our universities the best in the country and world.

For the stated reasons, I urge you to consider modifying HB 4124 before you move this forward. We appreciate the focus of this legislation but believe that there are critical elements that should be updated.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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