

Submitter:

Jason Brown

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB4124

#### Public Comment on HB 4124 – Protecting Enrollment Stability

I'm writing in a personal capacity as a faculty member at the University of Oregon and as a department head who has served in academic leadership roles for roughly 15 years. I support the Legislature's interest in careful, system-level analysis and long-term planning for Oregon's public universities. That work is necessary and responsible. Regardless of what people think of the value of a liberal arts education, we all want the UO to thrive and serve the people of Oregon. The UO has faced some challenging times recently (as have many universities across the country), but the university can stabilize and find its footing in a changing higher education landscape. As the UO goes through changes in the coming years, it is imperative to avoid disrupting the flow of out-of-state tuition by creating visible political shocks to the system.

I want to flag one specific risk that is easy to underestimate from inside policy and governance discussions: out-of-state (OOS) student demand is extremely sensitive to signals of institutional instability, uncertainty, or perceived "intervention." For universities like UO, OOS enrollment is not marginal—it is structurally central to financial sustainability. There is no realistic substitute for that revenue that does not shift more cost onto Oregon students and families or require substantial new state appropriations.

Families and counselors outside Oregon do not follow policy details; they react to headlines, tone, and simple signals about whether a university feels stable or "in flux." Even well-intentioned reforms can have unintended consequences if they generate public narratives that suggest instability, restructuring, or loss of institutional continuity. When confidence is shaken, the effects typically appear one or two admission cycles later and can take years to rebuild.

My hope is that as this work proceeds, special care is taken not only in substance but also in framing and public communication, so that Oregon does not inadvertently damage the enrollment streams that help keep its universities affordable and financially viable for in-state students. Thoughtful planning and coordination can and should coexist with stability and confidence—but that stability is itself a critical asset worth protecting.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Jason B. Brown