

To: House Committee on Education, in regards to HB 4124

From: Interinstitutional Faculty Senate (faculty representatives from all seven public universities in Oregon, and Oregon Health Sciences University, IFS)

This Testimony comes to the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon from the Interinstitutional Faculty Senate, a body representing the faculty of all seven public universities through their respective Faculty Senates and the faculty of the Oregon Health Sciences University.

IFS does not support HB 4124 without significant changes to ensure the full engagement of the universities.

As a representative body, IFS works closely with HECC and other state entities in contributing to state-wide initiatives that impact higher education, and acts as a conduit on a variety of policy initiatives that require the meaningful inclusion of the perspectives of faculty and academic professionals. After about a decade under the current statewide system of independent boards and HECC oversight, we agree that a thoughtful assessment of the system's performance and future needs is warranted.

The current study proposed under HB 4124 – to be undertaken by HECC to examine the “condition of Oregon’s post-secondary education system and to develop detailed recommendations for the design, implementation and operation of a viable and superior institutional framework” – has the potential to radically change not only the operations of Oregon’s Public Universities (OPU), but alter longstanding principles of shared governance and institutional autonomy under which all our institutions currently operate. IFS sees it is imperative to bring to your attention the following concerns:

1. Although faculty agree that after about a decade of a statewide system of higher education under HECC and independent Boards a reevaluation of the resiliency of this new approach for Oregon is reasonable, appointing HECC in an evaluative capacity of academic programs is beyond HECC’s staff current expertise, excludes the work done by universities in collaboration with accrediting organizations to ensure our programs are nationally and internationally well recognized and competitive, and endangers the reputation we have built programmatically through years of relationships with professionals partners who support our students’ success. Faculty at each institution must retain a predominant role in decisions about academic programming and curricular change, and any study or restructuring recommendations must respect this core area of faculty governance and expertise.
2. Although the bill asks the commission to “consult public institutions of higher education, including faculty, staff and students, and any other interested stakeholders identified by the commission” the deadline for producing a study of this magnitude before December 1, 2026 is unrealistic if such consultation is to be meaningful rather than perfunctory. A study of this

breadth cannot rely on a small number of convenings or consultant-driven exercises if it is to meet the bill's mandate for robust engagement with institutions, faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders in the State of Oregon.

3. The recent report from HECC on "Spending and Efficiency in OPU" asserts that higher education is overall efficient (by many of the metrics and comparisons that appear in the report), yet the investment the state has made in public universities in the last decade falls far behind similar investments made by our neighboring states; rather than hiring more external consultants (often out-of-state, possibly with certain political ideologies) to perform such a study IFS would like to echo OSU's President Murthy emphasis on "using the decades of experience universities have to advance not only the state's educational goals, but research and economic development goals." Any study of restructuring, collaboration, or integration must therefore be explicitly linked to a commitment to adequate and sustainable public funding for higher education; restructuring without new investment risks masking a funding crisis as a governance problem.

The Interinstitutional Faculty Senate stands ready to serve as a statewide conduit for faculty input throughout any study conducted under HB 4124, supplementing—rather than replacing—robust engagement with faculty senates and other campus bodies at each institution.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cristina Negoita".

Cristina Negoita, PhD

IFS President

College of Health, Arts and Sciences

Oregon Tech