

February 4, 2026

The Honorable Zach Hudson, Chair
House Committee on Education
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 4124 - Eastern Oregon University Board of Trustees Concerns Regarding HECC Draft Spending and Efficiency Recommendations

Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Charles Hofmann, and I serve as Chair of the Eastern Oregon University Board of Trustees. On behalf of the Board, I appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective as you consider issues related to the spending, efficiency, and long-term sustainability of Oregon's public universities.

We recognize and share the Legislature's goals of affordability, efficiency, and financial responsibility. Eastern Oregon University has taken these goals seriously. Over the past decade, EOU has had some of the lowest growth in total cost of attendance among Oregon's public universities, and most recently implemented an 8.4 percent reduction to our operating budget. These actions reflect disciplined stewardship and a sustained commitment to students and taxpayers.

At the same time, our Board has serious concerns regarding elements of the Draft Recommendations contained in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission's *Spending and Efficiency in Oregon Public Universities* report.

In particular, the report's call for "institutional integration," including potential mergers or expanded centralized control, is premature and risks harming regional universities. This approach assumes inefficiency where discipline already exists and could impose one-size-fits-all solutions on institutions with fundamentally different missions, scales, and geographic realities. For rural-serving universities like EOU, such mandates could weaken access, destabilize operations, and undermine the very efficiencies these recommendations seek to achieve.

The report also identifies growth in academic programs as a potential concern. This conclusion lacks important context. The EOU Board of Trustees regularly reviews the financial outlook for new and existing programs to ensure responsible use of university resources. Much of the program growth at EOU—and across Oregon's public universities—reflects low-cost concentrations, certificates, and workforce-aligned pathways built on existing courses. These programs are often net-neutral or fiscally positive and directly respond to critical rural workforce needs in healthcare, education, and technology.

We strongly believe that any academic program review process should meaningfully include university boards, using criteria that are mutually developed by the universities and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

EOU supports voluntary collaboration and shared services where they clearly reduce costs and improve value. We are already actively participating in shared services efforts, including the TRU and Portland State University initiative. However, we oppose mandates that would erode institutional autonomy or disproportionately harm rural institutions that are already doing the hard work of managing costs responsibly.

We also see areas within the recommendations that merit further development and legislative support, including a salary pool to retain and support our employees, strategic technology investments to better serve students and campuses, and expansion of shared services that institutions are already pursuing collaboratively.

We look forward to continued partnership with the Legislature and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to strengthen Oregon's higher education system—without sacrificing the institutions that serve our most geographically isolated and economically vulnerable students. As has been noted by another Oregon university graduate, the value of our public universities cannot, and should not, be measured by cost efficiency alone.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Hofmann" followed by a stylized flourish or initial.

Dr. Charles Hofmann
Chair, Board of Trustees
Eastern Oregon University