

February 22, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Reardon, Chair
House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce
900 Court Street NE, Room 431
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support for HB 2782 – Full Funding of OSU-Cascades Expansion

Chair Reardon and Committee Members:

On behalf of the members of the Central Oregon Business Plan, we are writing to support HB 2782 and authorizing \$69.5 million in state bonds to support the planned expansion of OSU-Cascades.

The Central Oregon Business plan is an association of business community leaders focused on public issues that affect our region's way of life and future. We partner with the Oregon Business Council and present our priorities as part of the annual Leadership Summit and Business Plan.

The expansion of OSU-Cascades (OSU-C) is our highest priority. Central Oregon is one of the fastest growing business regions in the nation, and our companies are diversifying our economy with new manufacturing and cutting edge technological innovations. A highly qualified workforce with skills relevant to our businesses is crucial to our success, and in alignment with the continued growth of our region. To both attract our nation's brightest innovators and build up our local talent pipeline, we need to have a first-rate university campus to train future employees.

As you've no doubt heard, Central Oregon is known as an "education desert" and tremendously underserved in terms of higher education. Outside of OSU-C, the nearest universities are three or more hours away. More than 70% of OSU-C's students are from Central Oregon, and many of them can't afford the additional cost of relocating to achieve a four-year degree. Combined with the fact that OSU-C's curriculum is in part being developed in concert with local business leaders – including many of our members – this campus will be an engine for highly skilled workers unlike any other. OSU-C will benefit the lives of our students, their families, local companies, and our communities. Ultimately, this also serves our entire state.

We understand that the OSU-C student body is projected to exceed its current capacity by the start of the 2021 school year; without the full funding from the Legislature this biennium, it will be faced with overcrowding and the possibility of turning students away. Just as the new campus is getting off the ground, the last thing we want to see is the tremendous momentum behind OSU-C stunted by a lack of funds.

We appreciate the difficult choices facing the Oregon legislature this session but, few investments offer the promise of OSU-C. We urge you to invest your limited resources where returns are greatest. **Please support HB 2782.**

Sincerely,

