



**Testimony on Senate Bills 158 and 159**  
Senate Education Committee  
March 13, 2019

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Thompson, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas, and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 158 and SB 159. From the HECC perspective, these bills are related, and this testimony is meant to address both of them.

HECC collects some data on the number of foster youth that participate in the foster youth waiver program, and I have attached that data at the end of my testimony. This data is incomplete. Only a subset of foster youth receive the tuition waiver due to the fact the tuition waiver only applies if student's cannot cover costs with state and federal aid programs.

Additionally, HECC is under a statutory requirement through SB 395 (2017) to match data with the Department of Human Services and create a much more complete picture of current and former foster youth enrolled in the state system and their success in higher education. The first report is due this year. This reporting will help inform state policymaking moving forward, and just like other disadvantaged and underserved populations, collecting accurate data is the first step in beginning to improve equity in access and outcomes.

These two bills go further than any current state effort to ensure that foster youth have equitable opportunity and the goal is laudable. These two bills also place the HECC at the center of program establishment and implementation at the campus level, a role that HECC, since its founding, has not traditionally played.

For campus initiatives, HECC often plays the role of consensus builder, grant maker, data aggregator, and reporter rather than the role of program developer and implementer. In the case of these two bills, HECC could convene a conversation around current foster youth initiatives, research and promote national best practices, fund institutions, collect data and promote promising approaches to the legislature for consideration as permanent programming. We would welcome the opportunity to make some modifications to these two bills to clarify our role in line with the current delineation of responsibilities between institutions and HECC in a way that maintains the emphasis these bills place on improving outcomes for foster youth.

Thank you for your time today.



## FOSTER YOUTH TUITION WAIVER PROGRAM UPDATE – FEBRUARY 2018

House Bill 3471 (2011) provided for tuition waivers to be made to all eligible current and former children and youth under age 25 who enroll in a public 2- or 4-year public institution of higher education as an undergraduate student within three years after the date the student ages out of foster care, graduates high school, or receives the equivalent of a high school diploma.

The table below provides information about the total number of foster youth who received tuition waivers and the total amount of dollars waived for 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17.

### Foster Youth Tuition Waivers – AY 2014 to 2016

	2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
	#	Dollars	#	Dollars	#	Dollars
Community Colleges	6	\$5,326	6	\$5,103	8	\$7,790
Public Universities	40	\$61,363	41	\$82,310	43	\$80,866
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>\$66,689</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>\$87,413</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>\$88,656</b>

### Additional Information

- Foster youth most likely to have received waivers attended the two highest-cost public universities.
- Many foster youth receive maximum Federal Pell Grants and Oregon Opportunity Grants (OOG). For 2016-17, the combined maximum for these grants was \$8065.
- The combination of maximum Pell and OOG funds is generally sufficient to cover tuition and fees for full-time, full-year enrollment at a community college in Oregon, as well as some non-tuition costs, such as books and supplies. Combined maximum Pell and OOG funds are also sufficient to cover up to 86% of average tuition and fees at public universities in Oregon.
- Starting in 2016-17, foster youth who were new high school graduates in 2016 may have qualified for an Oregon Promise grant, providing met eligibility criteria and began attendance at an Oregon community college within 6 months of graduating high school or completing a GED. The maximum Promise award for 2016-17 was \$3397. Promise is a “last-dollar” grant, so both Pell and OOG funds are considered. However, even foster youth who received full Pell and OOG would still have received an additional \$1000.

- The 30-hour volunteer service requirement may discourage renewals. Many foster youth are fully self-supporting and have less free time than many college students. The community service requirement may be tough for some self-supporting students because 30 hours represents earnings of between \$307.50 and \$337.50 at current Oregon minimum wage as well as 30 hours away from classes or work.