



Testimony on House Bill 2942
House Education Committee
April 3, 2019

Chair Doherty, Vice-Chairs Alonso Leon and Helt, and members of the Committee. My name is Ben Cannon, and I am the Executive Director of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 2942.

This bill emphasizes a belief that the Commission holds as central and inviolable: That access to a higher education system for diverse and underserved groups that serves their needs and offers them an equitable opportunity to achieve success is critical. It is not just critical for individual members of underserved groups, but for creating a campus environment and culture that benefits students, faculty, staff, and the state as teachers, learners, and citizens.

While we very strongly value this principle, our ability to execute it is constrained by the resources we have available. In 2016, we used available funds to hire a diversity, equity, and inclusion officer, on a part time basis, to promote the implementation of the Commission's adopted equity lens (attached). Unfortunately, with the passage of the 2017-19 budget, we were unable to maintain support for the position in light of restricted operational flexibility.

The agency requested, in advance of both the 17-19 and the 19-21 biennia, funding for this position, and we appreciate the opportunity provided by this bill to emphasize the need for dedicated staff to focus on this work. In the absence of such staff, even though we report on the performance of students and make efforts to fund institutions and students in a way that is intended to highlight and support equity issues, we lack the capacity we need to engage with representatives of underrepresented communities in deep and meaningful ways that would lead to significant policy changes designed to ensure equitable outcomes for students.

Recently, we received a \$689,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation aimed at helping Oregon eliminate disparities in the performance of underserved populations, and we have just hired for the administrator of this temporary project. We were selected in part because Lumina perceived that the leadership of both the executive and legislative branches were willing partners in eliminating historical inequities in student achievement. We believe the passage of this bill would reinforce that commitment in an important, and we hope permanent way.

Thank you for your time today.