April 2, 2019

TO: Co-chairs Sen. Lew Frederick and Rep. Susan McLain;
              Members of Education Subcommittee of Joint Ways & Means Committee

FROM: Ashley Henry, Business for a Better Portland

RE: Higher Education Funding in Oregon

Business for a Better Portland (BBPDX) is a new kind of business organization whose members believe that the health and prosperity of businesses depends on the health and prosperity of its citizens. Central to that prosperity is a vibrant and thriving education system – from cradle to career. Investments in public K-12 must be accompanied with similar investments in Oregon's community colleges and universities.

Oregon's greatest challenge is addressing an unstable and inadequate education funding system. BBPDX recognizes that statutory and constitutional constraints on local revenue have led to systemic shortfalls in funding across the educational continuum. The time to fix this decades-old deficiency is now. BBPDX knows that investing $2 billion of tax expenditures in education is a big ask of business — but it's the right ask.

Oregon's must be prepared for the future. The state's economy continues to change. From our traditional strengths in natural resources to the innovation in clean energy, advanced manufacturing and software driving the next wave of job growth, businesses depend on a highly-educated workforce with technical and communication skills. Expanding access to CTE programs in community colleges and keeping universities affordable and accessible are pivotal to preparing tomorrow's workforce.

Beyond building better businesses, access to a college or university degree lifts everyone in our communities. Investment in public education improves health outcomes, reduces crime and creates stability for families. And education spending has the added benefit of bringing everyone along, combatting the trend of increasing economic inequality facing not just Oregon but the country as a whole.

Invest in community colleges. Invest in public universities. Invest in Oregon.