

April 18, 2019

To: Co-Chairs, Members of the Joint Committee on Ways & Means Subcommittee on Education
From: Nathaniel Brown, OBI
RE: OBI Testimony in Support of Public University State Programs

Honorable Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Oregon Business & Industry's (OBI) membership of more than 1,600 businesses that employ nearly 330,000 people in the state, thank you for the opportunity to share our support for continued funding of Public University State Programs. OBI members value Oregon's public education system and support efforts to establish stable funding for strategic, evidence-based investments that result in measurable outcomes in student achievement. The health of our economy depends on the success of our public schools.

Oregon's workforce benefits directly from strong investments in career technical and postsecondary education, which is why OBI is seriously concerned about the directive in the co-chair's 2019-21 budget to evaluate and potentially eliminate Public University State Programs, including the Engineering Technology Sustaining Funds (ETSF), formerly called ETIC.

As you know, the Legislature is currently considering massive investments in early childhood education and K-12 schools through the Student Success Act. OBI has joined Governor Brown and others to call for a share of those new investments to be directed toward higher education, specifically through additional funding for Oregon Opportunity Grants and the CTE Pathways program. While the Student Success Act has yet to reach its final form, it is imperative that this committee also consider the significant impacts of continued disinvestment in higher education.

Oregon is expected to add more than 430,000 jobs in high-wage, high-demand fields between now and 2027, many of them in engineering and related professions. Should the Engineering Technology Sustaining Funds be reduced or eliminated, the future of business in Oregon will be negatively impacted. As Oregonians throughout the workforce adapt to developing technology and employers continue to seek qualified talent in diversifying fields, cutting funding to public university programs that prepare students for the workforce of tomorrow is not in our state's best interest.

The state must have tools like the ETSF to support and encourage continued job growth in these areas, as it will lead to greater economic mobility for more Oregonians. As our communities continue to have a broad and needed conversation about stabilizing education funding across the P20 continuum, it is essential that our policymakers not disregard this important tool. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on these critical investments in our students, our workforce and our state.

Contact: Nathaniel Brown, OBI, nathanielbrown@oregonbusinessindustry.com