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May 18, 2022

Joint Task Force on Student Success
for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education

Chair Alonso-Leon, and members of the Task Force:

My name is Deborah Arthur, and I am the Director of Portland State University's Higher Education in Prison Program. I also lead the Oregon Coalition of Higher Education in Prison (OCHEP), a collective of education providers and other stakeholders around the state who are invested in education for incarcerated students.

I want to thank you for your hard work on this task force, and your openness to hearing about all of the various barriers that historically underrepresented students seeking higher education face in Oregon. I know that, as part of your Road Tour to various educational institutions, you have had the chance to meet with formerly incarcerated students and hear from them as well, and I appreciate you including this group of students.

While I suspect this is something already under your consideration, I do want to raise the issue of all of the *currently* incarcerated college students across the state, and the particular barriers that they face to higher education. These students, and most especially women, are indeed historically underrepresented in higher education. While the return of Pell grant eligibility to incarcerated students in 2023 will go a long way toward making college more accessible for these students, it will not ensure sustainability of rigorous, quality higher education in prisons across Oregon. These students must not be discounted; inside prisons are some of the brightest minds and most eager students who will become problem-solvers and change makers, if only given the opportunity.

Examples of this abound: Dr. [Stanley Andrisse](#), who spent ten years behind bars, is now a respected endocrinologist and higher education advocate. [Dyjuan Tatro](#), featured in the film [College Behind Bars](#), is now a Senior Advisor for Strategic Outreach with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. [Rep. Tara Simmons](#) went from incarceration to the Washington Legislature. These are just a few of the many examples of formerly incarcerated people contributing meaningfully to society, partially as a result of their access to quality higher education; the [Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network](#) (FICGN) is replete with additional examples.

Higher education in prison drastically reduces recidivism, increases feelings of community connection and personal agency, and, particularly for women in prison, many of who are mothers, creates a cycle of achievement for their children.

I would urge you to consider state funding for eligible higher education in prison programs across the state, to align with and to complement the return of Pell, to ensure sustainability of access to quality higher education for incarcerated learners.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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