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November 17, 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.

Once again, I would like 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 had the opportunity to meet with you, along with some PSU students currently at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, and I very much appreciate you including and listening to this group of students. At times this group of students can be forgotten, but inside prisons are some of the brightest and most talented problem solvers and change makers. We need them.

I write in support of *Proposal SA-8: Establishment of a Permanent Committee for Post- Secondary Education for Adults in Custody*. As Ben Cannon, Executive Director of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, mentioned in his remarks to your Committee on November 17, 2022, *higher education is no longer a luxury but is a necessity*. This applies equally to people in prison, the vast majority of whom will return to our communities (although, I submit, ALL people are worthy and deserving of the access to learning). We are remiss and short-sighted as a state and as people who are tasked with promoting access and equity in higher education if we neglect the needs of incarcerated learners. It is imperative to have the support and coordination of HECC, Department of Corrections and the Oregon Coalition of Higher Education in Prison, working together to implement standards for higher education in prison.

Without such standards and oversight, incarcerated students are at risk of being taken advantage of, and might receive less than quality education, particularly as Pell dollars are introduced into the equation. Our incarcerated college students deserve nothing less than the same quality education we would offer to students on main campus. HECC must recognize this group of students and their needs, the DOC must recognize higher education as essential programming, and both HECC and DOC must work together with the OCHEP to ensure access, equity, and quality education for learners in custody.

Sincerely,

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