



## Legislative Testimony

### OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

March 8, 2021

The Honorable Michael Dembrow, Chair  
Senate Committee on Education

**Subject: Senate Bill 235**

Chair Dembrow and members of the committee, my name is Nathaline Frener and I serve as Assistant Director of the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) Correctional Services Division. I am providing testimony on Senate Bill 235 (SB 235) to share the anticipated impacts of the bill and to request amendments.

**What the Bill Does:**

SB 235 would require DOC to develop a plan by August 2021 for providing the equipment, infrastructure, and connectivity needed to provide AICs with internet access to education and vocation programs approved by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). It also requires DOC to have these services in place by September 2022.

**Background and Impacts:**

Five years ago, DOC purchased new servers and the internet platform currently in use. It is referred to as the "AIC network." The AIC network system is at its end of life. DOC's Information Technology Services Unit (IT) has made minor improvements; and by June 30, 2021, will have new hardware that *may* be able to maintain the system another four to five years. The AIC network system has some room for expansion to allow up to 1,000 users at any given time, but current use at that capacity would slow the system down to the point it would be unusable. The existing system can support 750 AICs at a time.

DOC is working on a plan for online education access but would be unable to finalize a plan by August 2021 as required by SB 235. Additional time would be needed to thoroughly research options, review vendors, and complete the Department of Administrative Services Office of State Chief Information Officer, Enterprise Information Services (EIS) review and approval process.

As eager as DOC is to implement online education, space limitation is a barrier that must be resolved. DOC does not have the staffing and equipment needed to have the required online education services in place by the September 2022 deadline. DOC would need additional funding to build and support the infrastructure to accommodate AIC online services and to purchase computers and related equipment for the new computer labs. DOC does not receive any assistance or support from EIS. Additional staff positions will be needed to provide, maintain, and audit equipment – as well as provide onsite supervision of the online education

computer labs, coordinate the addition of online courses, assist with scheduling, and assist with Free Application for Federal Student Aid applications.

This bill would require a second approval or certification of education programs by HECC. All high school equivalency, work-based education, and post-secondary opportunities offered in DOC facilities through its education partners already meet HECC and/or other recognized standards. This includes those that earn college credit, college certification, industry-recognized certifications or licenses, or are an apprenticeship program. Therefore, requiring DOC to obtain a second approval of its education programs creates an additional work burden on HECC and DOC – first to establish a process for the second review and approval process; and then to be included as an online education opportunity as outlined in SB 235, requiring DOC and HECC to undergo an approval process each time an education partner is willing to bring in a new education program.

Furthermore, it could be limiting because some of our AICs currently participate in correspondence courses with accredited colleges and universities, and it would be inappropriate for Oregon to certify or approve other states' recognized programs.

**Requested Action:**

DOC fully supports providing access to online education opportunities for men and women in custody, but currently lacks the resources or the funding needed to make it a reality now or by the bill's deadline.

DOC respectfully requests amendments to:

- Extend the final plan submittal deadline from August 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021;
- Extend the implementation deadline from September 1, 2022, to January 2, 2023; and
- Eliminate the requirement for HECC approval of the online education programs inasmuch as 1) DOC contracts with partner agencies, including HECC, to ensure education programs meet HECC requirements; 2) post-secondary programs provided by partner educators meet recognized standards for college credit, licensing, etc.; and 3) correspondence courses are already required to be approved in accordance with OAR 291-113. DOC proposes the HECC approval requirement be replaced with: “. . . or the program earns one of the following: college credit, college degree, college certification, industry-recognized certification or license, or an apprenticeship.”

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

*Submitted by:*

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