

Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward, Rayfield and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Lussier and I live in Bend, Oregon. I have served on the State Board of Higher Education, and retired as CEO of St. Charles Medical Center in Bend, but long before that thanks to a succession of short-term loans, campus jobs, and ROTC, I graduated from the University of Oregon in '64, and received an MBA from the Charles H. Lundquist College of Business at UO in 1966. I realize now that even as students work as hard as I did, they must take out major loans to pay for college. That's why I respectfully request that you support robust investments in public higher education, including funding the Public University Support Fund at \$900 million, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant at \$200 million.

When students have opportunities afforded to them that allow them to succeed, they have thriving careers and family-wage jobs. I credit my academic preparation in sociology and business, coupled with practical experience and mentorship in campus jobs, with giving me the tools necessary for lifelong success. Funding for Oregon's public universities creates opportunities for all Oregon students, and it is more critical now than ever. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities for lower-income, rural, and students of color. It is critical that colleges and universities have adequate resources to address these disparities and ensure that all students have access to opportunity.

Additionally, as the former CEO of St. Charles Medical Center, I cannot tell you enough that we must invest in a well-educated, highly trained workforce to ensure that we recover from this pandemic and are ready for whatever comes next. Our public universities and colleges have played an important role in addressing the pandemic, and they are also where we train future doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals – the people who have been working on the frontlines over the past year. Reduced funding would challenge the ability of our institutions to continue providing the fast, efficient, and accurate research and testing required to ensure our state's equitable recovery, and it would exacerbate the existing need for more healthcare professionals. The willingness of policymakers to commit resources to protect the state's fragile cradle-to-career public education system may determine whether the impact of COVID-19 is measured in years or in generations.

As a past member of the State Board of Higher Education, I believe we have a moral imperative to fund our public colleges and universities. The health and wellness of Oregonians depends on it, and we owe it to the next generation to leave a legacy so that somebody else can benefit from our success and the opportunities we've been given. The state of Oregon lags behind other states in funding for public higher education and funding for student financial aid. In fact, funding limitations have meant that the Oregon Opportunity Grant, the state's only need-based financial aid program, is not available to thousands of students of demonstrate significant financial need. I hope you will increase funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant and the Public University Support Fund to ensure that we are giving students the same academic preparation, practical experience, and mentorship that we were able to benefit from.

Thank you for serving our community. I know you will be forced to make tough budget decisions this session, and I hope you will prioritize funding for public education.

Sincerely,
Jim Lussier