

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 4, 2021

Representative Teresa Alonso Leon, Chair
Committee on Education
House of Representatives
Oregon State Capitol

Ref: SB 712

Chair Alonso Leon, Honorable Colleagues:

Thank you for considering Senate Bill 712 (SB 712). This relatively “small scale” piece of legislation is among the most important measures I have ever asked the Oregon Legislature to consider for passage. It is about equity, fairness, justice, as well as sustainability. SB 712 is, in many ways, a medical therapy – a treatment – to confront cancer that continues to weaken our “system” of public universities.

Since the Balkanization of the former Oregon University System (formerly the Oregon State System of Higher Education), the Higher Education Coordination Commission (HECC) has pushed policies that favor larger universities, often at the expense of Technical and Regional Universities (TRUs). It is not a coincidence that some of the most successful programs in Oregon History are now – on the cutting room floor in the budget processes of some of our TRUs – because of the ability of larger universities to leverage economies of scale.

The rise of the individual “Board of Trustees” for individual public universities have made for “Academic/Programming Darwinism.” Ideally, all would put the needs of the whole ahead of the potential reward for the few, but that has not been the case. Although I believe the Kitzhaber-led Higher Education “reforms” are a complete, total, and undeniable failure, we are stuck with the HECC structure for the time being.

Therefore, we need to transform the existing HECC structure and internal dynamics.

We need voices, with the full right to vote their conscience, as a leveling force within the HECC dynamics. Ironically, it will take the changes included in this SB 712 to provide perspectives that are structurally “system-oriented.” We must not allow our public universities to continue the path towards irrelevance and decline. I ask us to think strategically and demand a HECC that approaches the challenges of 21st Century adult education and training with a better, stronger – more welcoming – lens. SB 712 is a necessary remedy to stem the damage already survived.

In conclusion, I ask you – beg of you – support for SB 712. As a former student, student leader, teaching assistant, and professor within Oregon’s public universities, I believe we can and must do better for our students, staff, and the State of Oregon.

Respectfully,