

May 5, 2021

Chair Alonso León; Vice Chairs Neron and Weber; and House Education Committee members Hudson, Owens, Reardon, Ruiz, Brock Smith, Sollman, and Wright:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 712, which would extend the voting rights on the existing Higher Education Coordinating Commission to include student, faculty and non-faculty staff members.

On behalf of AFT-Oregon, we believe it is time to empower all voices on the HECC.

SB 712 would offer the chance for our university and community college voices to be heard – voices who have been at the table, participating in conversations and active on the HECC from the beginning. Now, it's time for those voices to have a vote.

As you know, the HECC is the primary state entity tasked with providing a strategic vision for the accessibility and affordability of higher education in Oregon. Right now, only 9 of the 14 members on this commission can vote on these issues.

Student, faculty and staff representation, who provide crucial perspectives and experience, should have an equal voice on higher education policy, funding, oversight and accountability – like their voting counterparts.

SB 712 would not only expand voting rights on the HECC like we have long needed, but it creates a new position for a graduate student – a demographic that has so far been overlooked and left out of the important conversations happening on this commission.

The HECC's visionary statement says that its purpose is to envision a future "in which all Oregonians—and especially those whom our systems have underserved and marginalized—benefit from the transformational power of high-quality postsecondary education and training."

It is hard to imagine the HECC fulfilling this vision, when its current structure marginalizes the voices of the very people it's meant to serve.

I urge your yes vote on SB 712 and I thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Thank you,

Jaime Rodriguez
President, AFT-Oregon