

Dear Members of the Oregon Senate Committee on Rules,

My name is Dr. Malori A. Musselman and I am a resident of Senate District 4 in Eugene, Oregon. I am submitting this written testimony today in support of Senate Bill 854.

Governing boards hold immense power over the lives of thousands of students and the graduate employees, faculty, and staff that work tirelessly to provide quality education and safe learning conditions at Oregon's public universities.

These boards hold a fiduciary responsibility to the universities for which they are appointed. That is to say, they are the bodies that *should* be held accountable when universities struggle financially, price students out of an education, or fail to fulfill the mission of the institutions. They determine how universities are managed and the institution's ability to survive and thrive in times of turmoil. But the member selection process, information gathering processes for internal decisions, and the trustee meeting procedures are actively harming Oregon's public institutions.

One of the main hurdles to providing quality higher education in this state is the composition of the governing boards. There are almost no guardrails for appointees at this time; almost no considerations the Governor *must* make before appointing members to Oregon's institutional governing boards. On the most basic level, these governing board members should be required to live in Oregon if they are influencing the very viability of our educational institutions and the broader future of this state.

Let us consider the University of Oregon as just one example, though it is not alone in its board's problematic constitution. One trustee was an executive for a sportswear company (replaced recently by someone from the same company who lives in Maryland), two were executives at timber products companies (one replaced by a CFA at an investment firm and the other by a UO alum and administrator for Walmart), and another is a CEO of a charter middle school out of state. What qualifications do they have in ensuring that *this* university is aligning its financial responsibilities with the academic, institutional, cultural, and communal goals of the students and workers on *this* campus and in *this* community? *None*.

Can a concerned stakeholder contact them individually about their decisions to hold them accountable? *No*. Students, graduate employees, faculty, staff, and community members often have no way to communicate directly with board members to discuss issues of importance on campuses or to hold them accountable for their decisions because board members for public institutions are not currently required to have official publicly available email addresses. Furthermore, the board secretary also holding a position in university administration creates yet another barrier to communication and action.

There are many recent former students and staff who would gladly serve on these boards, are experienced in the daily ongoings of the universities and finances—people who actually care about students and workers first and foremost and who do not work at massive out of state corporations.

Search committees for presidents of public universities should also be comprised *mostly* of the people that make a university a university in the first place. These governing boards should be required to conduct comprehensive evaluations of presidents of public universities every two years because otherwise these presidents do things like: attack their own students in the New York Times for exercising their rights; fail to take adequate responsibility for their role in sexual misconduct investigations; build themselves shiny new office spaces instead of paying staff; or spend thousands of

dollars in public money on fighting unionization of workforces without any real oversight or checks on the use of these powers. When stakeholders do voice their discontent—including democratic votes of no confidence in the ranges of 90-96% at many public universities—this is often met with absolutely no action.

Lastly, *all* stakeholders at an institution should have a clear and *effective* process for appealing decisions made by their governing boards.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I hope that you all will support SB 854.