



Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thomsen and Committee Members,

Our names are Maggie Gates and Evelyn Kocher and we are testifying on behalf of the Oregon Student Association, a membership-based organization representing over 65,000 students across the state's public universities and community colleges.

I am here today to share my concerns with the report on university governance from my experience as an interviewee and our organization's nearly fifty years of operations.

In order for Boards of Trustees to achieve their intended mission, it is vital that we increase the accessibility and transparency of these bodies. The current Board of Trustees structure does not center the concerns of the people on university campuses that their decisions most affect. The voices of these folks (specifically students, both graduate and undergraduate, faculty, and classified staff) need to not only be included in the board, but sought out and given autonomy over their futures by ensuring voting rights and additional seats.

The report that was given was compiled by two consultants who have experience in higher education administration and serving on boards of trustees themselves. While many of the recommendations (such as ensuring further outreach from these boards to the university public that they serve) are long overdue and much needed, the report does not even mention the structural lack of inclusion of student, faculty, and staff voices in university governance structures. This, along with the universities' offered concessions after the tabling of SB 854 during the 2021 legislative session, seems to make surface-level fixes without offering any meaningful changes.

Despite this being mentioned explicitly in numerous interviews, the report instead offers solutions that do nothing to solve the structural issues that have caused very public crises in presidential searches at no fewer than three of the seven state universities in the past two years alone. These issues would have been much more easily resolved if the governing bodies in question were more in touch with the communities they serve; you need look no further than the initial vote of the Oregon State University Board of Trustees' initial vote to retain then-President F. King Alexander, where the board unanimously voted to keep him despite his history of presiding over rampant Title IX violations in his previous job at Louisiana State University—with the notable exception of the board's student and faculty representatives. Failing to identify the structural issues that continue to plague university governance in Oregon in this report seems to stem from the consultant's previous experience in higher education governance themselves.

Student, faculty, and classified concerns with the board of trustees structure are not adequately represented in the report. I urge you to please consider our story when making any future decisions on university governance policy.

Thank you for your time,
Maggie Gates and Evelyn Kocher