

To Senator Dembrow, the Senate Education Committee, the Oregon Governance Project, and whom it may concern,

Thank you all immensely for this opportunity for students to speak with you directly regarding this important topic. My name is Tali Ilkovitch. I am an Honors undergraduate at Oregon State University. I have served my community as a Senator for the Associated Students of OSU (ASOSU), through my contributions to the Disarm OSU and We Can Do The Work campaign, as a current Community Relations Representative for the OSU Pride Center, as well as in many other capacities. I am writing to you today in continuous concern for my own campus community, and other college campus communities across Oregon regarding the systematically undemocratic governance process evident in the Board of Trustees university system.

I urge you to consider this evidence, gathered and experienced by myself and many others, as part of your information-gathering phase regarding your review of university governance processes. These instances highlight a consistent failure of the OSU Board of Trustees to meaningfully engage and use their institutional power in accordance with the needs and desires of the student body.

For the past year and a half I and others have consistently expressed our community's dire need for expanded mental health resources, unarmed crisis mediation response, increased service of the OSU Survivor & Advocacy and Resource Center (SARC), amongst other resources. Many of us organized ourselves and our demands through the We Can Do The Work campaign—the full list of its demands can be on the front page of wecandothework.com. In light of international action against police brutality following the murder of George Floyd on May 25th of 2020, students, faculty, and staff have repeatedly requested that the Board of Trustees reallocate funding (sourced by our tuition and tax dollars) away from OSU's new campus police force (which we have expressed disapproval over since its inception), and towards these essential, healthcare-based programs. My own testimonies have reflected all of these sentiments, often in context of my own survivorship of campus rape and direct need for these changes.

The minutes of OSU's Board of Trustees meetings demonstrate these many community expressions of concern spanning many departments and roles across campus. I personally have testified for the BoT five separate times, each time repeating similar sentiments urging the Board to act in line with our community's needs and priorities. Please review the public comment sections of the meeting minutes linked below as evidence of the consistent community feedback that the Board received regarding these decisions:

- [August 14th, 2020](#)
- [September 17th, 2020](#)
- [October 16th, 2020](#)
- [January 29th, 2021](#)
- [March 17th, 2021](#)

Note that these minutes represent *every single meeting* that invited public comment for this time period (August of 2020 through March of 2021). We kept showing up because they kept ignoring

us. I experienced repeated institutional gaslighting by multiple members of the Board, who refused to hear and act on my story and the stories of others. For instance, the first time I testified, members of the Board responded with accusations that I and other speakers were “outsiders” just looking to stir trouble. Furthermore, despite how returning voices of survivors like myself expressed that the expansion of SARC needed to be prioritized over implementation of armed police, and brought forth evidence of police being found to ingrain feelings of secondary victimization¹, blame², and doubt³ in survivors, multiple Board members entirely overlooked our testimonies and continued to insist that armed police were necessary to “solve” sexual violence on campus.

This continuous dismissal and denial of community priorities by the BoT has resulted in widespread harm that still plagues our campus community today, notably via the appointment of former OSU President F. King Alexander, whose mass harms perpetuated towards student survivors are detailed in Husch Blackwell’s [Louisiana State University Title IX Review](#). This report sent ripple effects throughout our community, resulting in deep institutional distrust for the Board of Trustees, whom the OSU faculty senate have voted [no confidence](#) in, calling upon its members to resign.

As the [meeting minutes](#) of the March 17th, 2021 BoT emergency meeting following the publicization of the Husch Blackwell Report demonstrate, I was the first of eighteen students, faculty, and staff to testify our distrust and outrage towards the negligence of the OSU Board of Trustees in their Presidential hiring process, and their continual lack of material support for survivors on campus. Along with these testimonies, [this petition](#) was authored by leaders of our community demanding a variety of survivor-centered reform on campus. Note the co-authors and co-signers of this petition, comprising of leadership of prominent organizations which represent nearly every faction of the OSU community:

- Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE), Executive Council
- Associated Students of OSU (ASOSU), President & Vice President
- Brenda Tracy, Survivor and Founder of SetTheExpectation
- SEIU Local 503 Sublocal 083 Leadership
- United Academics at OSU (UAOSU), Executive Council and Representative Assembly
- We Can Do The Work and Disarm OSU
- Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies at OSU Leadership

We have seen no movement on any of the demands in this petition, in the testimonies, or the faculty senate’s vote of no-confidence towards the Board of Trustees. The only change has been the resignation of F. King Alexander. Prior to these events, SARC only had one-full time

¹ Campbell R. Rape Survivors’ Experiences With the Legal and Medical Systems: Do Rape Victim Advocates Make a Difference? *Violence Against Women*. 2006;12(1):30-45. doi:10.1177/1077801205277539

² Amy Dellinger Page (2008) JUDGING WOMEN AND DEFINING CRIME: POLICE OFFICERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AND RAPE, *Sociological Spectrum*, 28:4, 389-411, DOI: [10.1080/02732170802053621](#)

³ Lorenz, K., Kirkner, A., & Ullman, S. E. (2019). A Qualitative Study Of Sexual Assault Survivors’ Post-Assault Legal System Experiences. *Journal of trauma & dissociation : the official journal of the International Society for the Study of Dissociation (ISSD)*, 20(3), 263–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2019.1592643>

advocate and one director/part-time advocate serving the entirety of Oregon State University's multi-campus, multi-cultural population of over 50,000 students, staff, faculty.

As a result of the institution's inaction towards expanding survivor resources in light of the Husch Blackwell report, we have lost *both* of our SARC advocates—director and part-time advocate Becca Williams, and full-time advocate Kimberly Hack. We also lost Sahana Prasad, Coordinator of Interpersonal Violence Services for OSU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). I personally received support from all three of these individuals and have been devastated to see them leave OSU. As far as I know, these positions have yet to be filled, and in the meantime, survivors like myself suffer with no resources catered specifically to survivors. Yet the well-funded campus police patrol as they please.

These accounts are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of OSU's lack of transparency and democratic governance. Those organizing around these issues including myself were continually bounced back and forth between OSU administrators dodging responsibility for their decisions, and refusing to engage in the governance process in good faith. I have documentation of many instances like these that I can share, but there are far too many to include in this letter.

I attended nearly the entire OSU session hosted by Carol Cartwright, and despite the eloquent speakers I heard from that day highlighting the inherent flaws of the governing boards' current structure, we are told that we "don't know how the Board of Trustees works." We do know how it works, and we know that the addition of more forums in isolation won't solve the underlying issue that the Board of Trustees is inherently undemocratically appointed and unaccountable to our community. We need concrete, systemic change that further integrates our community onto the Board itself in the name of true shared governance. .

In early 2021, Oregon Senators Frederick and Gelser and Representatives Evans and Mclain introduced [Senate Bill 854](#), calling for the incorporation of student, faculty, and nonfaculty staff positions into both university governing boards and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). It proposes strong involvement of these positions in the university presidential search process, and encourages that each member of a university governing board should have an official email address. It suggests allowing representatives from official student/faculty/staff organizations to present and report to the board, and that times for public comment on any issue that goes before the board are established. It increases the HECC's powers to include comprehensive evaluations of university presidents at least once every two years, and vests in them the power to establish a process in which any employee or enrolled student of a public university listed in ORS 352.002 can appeal to the commission. These appeals could lead to the HECC's ability to overturn any decision made by the governing board if doing so is necessary to further the goals and mission of post-secondary education set forth in ORS 350.009 and 350.014 or to further the legislative findings set forth in ORS 352.025.

This is what democracy looks like.

I hope that the Oregon Governance Project finds the information and perspective I have provided helpful. I hope you hear my story—my community's story. These struggles have fallen on unlistening ears for far too long. I hope the Oregon Senators' and Representatives' proposed language cited above is prioritized and enacted in the necessary legislative reform of university governing systems, deconsolidating these powers more directly into the hands of those most affected by their decisions, and those whose tuition and tax dollars directly fund them. I hope to see future students, laborers, and educators get the institutional support they need to succeed, and for our participation in the governing process to be centered and addressed meaningfully. I hope to see the Oregon legislature restructure these governing boards to be in line with our shared values of democracy, education, and centering of community leadership, wellness, and prosperity. I hope for transparency, accountability, and most of all, justice.

Solidarity,

Tali Ilkovitch (they/them)
Community Relations Representative | OSU Pride Center
Natural Resources | College of Forestry
Ethnic Studies | College of Liberal Arts
Community Member
Survivor

Land Acknowledgement: Oregon State University in Corvallis, OR is located within the traditional homelands of the Mary's River or Ampinefu Band of Kalapuya. Following the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855 (Kalapuya etc. Treaty), Kalapuya people were forcibly removed to reservations in Western Oregon. Today, living descendants of these people are a part of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon (<https://www.grandronde.org>) and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians (<https://ctsi.nsn.us>).

[Black Lives Matter](#)
[We Can Do The Work](#)