



Testimony on House Bill 1522
Senate Education Committee
February 1, 2022

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 1522 and the -3 amendment.

Equity Minded Improvements to the Oregon Promise

If amended with the -3 amendment, Section 19 of SB 1522 will contain provisions modifying the Oregon Promise program, designed to distribute more program resources to low income students. Because the Oregon Promise is a last dollar program, students who have high levels of resources receive more from this program than students with fewer resources. The challenge we face is that this gap is increasing over time, as the maximum award amount increases with tuition increases, while the minimum amount, the amount that low income students receive, has been frozen by statute since 2016.

[HECC presented](#) two weeks ago on this topic and we detailed that while 52% of program recipients are low income Pell grant students, they only capture 21% of program funds, while students with family incomes estimated at over \$100,000 captured 39% of funds.

HECC proposes making three changes to improve the program:

1. Doubling the minimum award amount from \$1000 to \$2000, and indexing future increases to the increase in average community college tuition rates – This change restores the buying power of the minimum award and will prevent the erosion we have seen since the program was created in 2016.
2. Eliminating the \$50 per term co-pay – Because the Promise is designed only to cover tuition and fees, students already have ‘skin in the game’ by paying for books, housing, food, and transportation. This co-pay reduces the minimum award by 15%, but the maximum award by less than 4%, and eliminating it better serves low income students.
3. Reducing the GPA requirement from 2.5 to 2.0 – Many low income and underrepresented populations have difficulty in high school, but succeed in higher education, and the 2.5 GPA requirement serves as an unnecessary gateway for students seeking to access higher education.

As proposed, these changes can be made within the currently available appropriations for the program in the current biennium, and the Commission anticipates it will not need to impose any income limits on program participants. HECC hopes you will support these changes.

Importantly, the Commission views these changes as improvements on the margins of the program, and while they're meaningful for some students, they fall short of the broad overhaul and significant increases in financial aid availability that would place Oregon amongst national leaders in college affordability. As it stands, Oregon today is a below-average provider of educational aid. The Commission introduced policy in 2021 to try to address these challenges, and is ready to work with the legislature to continue to pursue significant improvements to state financial aid programs, through the Taskforce on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education or any other venue available.

Provision of Menstrual Products to Students

Another provision the Commission is following is amendments to HB 3294 (2021) through Section 12 of this bill. HECC has been working with advocates and institutions to implement the requirement that period products be made widely available at public institutions of higher education. HECC has requested an amendment to the current bill on behalf of those institutions and advocates that allows the commission to implement the bill in a manner that better recognizes the complexity of some spaces on campus.

If adopted, the amendments would allow HECC to include residence halls as spaces where period products must be offered, without requiring institutions to place and maintain them in all bathrooms, which is particularly an issue where bathrooms are located in closed suites and apartments. Instead, the requirement would apply to more commonly accessible areas.

If this amendment is adopted, the Commission will likely adopt the final rule implementing HB 3294 at its April meeting.

Thank you for your time today.