

Written Testimony on Senate Bill 272
January 24, 2023

Greetings Honorable Committee Chair Senator Dembrow, Vice Chair Senator Weber and members of the Education Committee Senators Anderson, Fredrick, Blouin, Robinson and Wagner

My name is Bennie Moses-Mesubed, and I am the Executive Director for COFA Alliance National Network (CANN) of Oregon and a staff at Eastern Oregon University(EOU) where we have a growing number of students from the Freely Associated States who have a Compact of Free Association treaty between United States and Republic of Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands or Federated States of Micronesia that I have in the past recruited who have a special interest in going into the nursing program at Oregon Health Science University, which has a Nursing program in partnership with EOU on the La Grande campus.

As you may already know, one of the histories of the COFA nations treaty is connected to military agreement that resulted in nuclear testing in the islands that impacted many islanders in the region on a wide scale, including displacing families as well as damaged the environment and economy. Cancer and other illnesses have impacted our island people and they often migrate to the US for healthcare.

The drive to be educated in order to also be part of the solution in positioning our young people with the education needed to provide healthcare services is a need and an aspiration. But financial burdens are real to many college students and especially those who are most minoritized and our COFA students are among those groups.

The ability to be provided in state tuition at Oregon Health Science University for current students and future students is a much needed equity and access to higher education for students from the Freely Associated States with a COFA agreement with the US.

By passing this bill, it will also provide a pathway for success and release the financial burden for many more COFA students to have an opportunity to go into the Nursing at Oregon Health Science University and fulfill our goals as promised through our mutual agreement outlined within the Compact of Free Association with the US.

Thank you for your time and the work you do to advance equity and inclusion for our students and community.

Sincerely,

Bennie Moses-Mesubed