



## Service Employees International Union Local 503

*72,000 public services workers, care providers, and non-profit employees in Oregon.*

**To:** Senate Committee on Education  
**On:** February 16th, 2023  
**Re:** Senate Bill 273

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber and members of the committee,

On behalf of our members, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of [SB 273](#) with the -1 amendment.

SEIU 503 represents about 4,000 workers on the seven public university campuses. Our classified members on university campuses maintain grounds and campus spaces, and work in our libraries, IT, health services nutrition programs and academic programs — representing most of the non-teaching and non-management positions on these campuses.

At the same time, we see higher education issues from a second vantage point — over half of our 72,000 statewide members are low-wage earners — most without health care and retirement benefits. They and their families know that post-secondary training and education is the way out of poverty for their families, neighbors, clients and loved ones. As we testify on behalf of our classified employees, we also testify on behalf of the families and community members who experience both the benefits and the barriers at our institutions first-hand.

For over a decade, we have advocated for better accountability and oversight of university operations. We have asked, on behalf of all of our members, for the elevation, inclusion and consideration of all voices at university decision-making tables. We have especially advocated for the voices of our campus and local community members, who are vital to the success of our post-secondary institutions.

When it comes to university governance, we believe that well-informed board members, who are connected to the values and the culture of campus communities, provide the best opportunity to represent and enact the public's interest. We believe strongly that the current process for selecting board members does not offer the proper transparency, accountability and consensus required of a public entity. We also believe that our existing board composition is not conducive to equitable, representative outcomes.

In addition, we believe strongly that boards should execute strong oversight of the administration, and that all board staff should be independent of the administration to assist the board in this responsibility. We affirm that affordable access to a quality post-secondary education for Oregonians is foundational to a strong democracy and a strong economy.

With these values in mind, our members regularly advocate for increased investment in our seven public universities, in addition to our ongoing advocacy for the closer examination of the powers, roles and responsibilities of the HECC, Governor and university institutional boards.

Throughout the years, we have appreciated the opportunity for ongoing conversations with stakeholders, agencies, legislators and others to elevate these values. Most recently, in the 2021 Regular Session, SEIU Local 503 was among a large group of partners working with Senator

Frederick on [SB 854](#). While this legislation did not pass, we have continued to advocate for the promises it presented: a more transparent board selection process, the inclusion of more voices, and many other changes we believe are necessary.

Since that time, we've been grateful for the opportunity to express our concerns through the Public University Governance Workgroup commissioned by Senator Dembrow. Over the past years, we've reiterated our belief that public universities, as public goods, should be held to the same standard of accountability, oversight and transparency that other public entities face — ensuring a level of responsibility and equity that all Oregonians deserve for state-funded services.

For these reasons, we opposed the autonomy provided to public institutions through the governing model first created in 2011 ([SB 242](#)). Many of the red flags we anticipated then are true today — our institutional boards have provided too much power to the already powerful, and have left the under-served, under-resourced and under-represented voices behind.

In 2013, we continued our pushback on these issues with [opposition](#) to [SB 270](#) and [HB 3120](#) — raising concerns around the systemic failure to include the perspectives of people who actually work, live, learn and dedicate their careers to our institutions. Without their voices in our institutional decision-making processes, we are failing to center equity, fairness and transparency in the way that our communities deserve.

While these conversations, testimonies and exchanges over the past decade have been important in elevating the concerns of campus and community members, they have never resulted in the systemic changes that we believe are essential to an equitable, transparent process. The same can be said for the conversations today.

However, we understand the need for including all voices in the solutions presented — even those with whom we disagree. We value and respect the need to find a collaborative, viable path forward for our institutional boards. We know that they are not working, and we stand ready to make them better in whatever way we can.

With this in mind, SEIU supports SB 273 with the -1 amendment. We believe it will address some of the most pressing concerns in our public university governance systems, while leaving the door open for continued progress.

We know that the legislation presented before you is the work of extensive compromise, collaboration and conversation. We understand the politics at play and we appreciate any progress towards our shared goal of better serving Oregonians — SEIU sees the value in the modest steps made in SB 273 and we hope that the Oregon Legislature will recognize their value, as well.

**On behalf of our members, we urge your support of HB 273 and ask that you pass it out of committee with the -1 amendment.**

Thank you,

**Service Employees International Union, Local 503, OPEU**