

Senator Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Nick Keough, and I am the Legislative Director for the Oregon Student Association.

Over the last year, it was my honor to serve as one of the undergraduate student members on Senator's Dembrow's workgroup on public university governance. As we reach nearly the exact 10 year anniversary of SB 270, the bill that created an individualized governing system and established a board of trustees for each of Oregon's seven public universities, I think there couldn't have been a better time to have had conversations that are assessing the effectiveness of this system, and where we could improve.

With the original creation of the individual Boards, as I understand it, the intention was to bring governance of our public universities closer to campus, and to acknowledge how different each of our public universities are from each other. This was a commendable ideal to reach for, but if you talk to students, faculty, and staff, we know that there is some work that needs to be done to ensure that our Boards and Board appointment process are responsive and transparent to our campus communities. Over just the last five years, we have seen university-wide scandals at multiple institutions, like OSU, OIT, and WOU, that have rocked our campus communities, led to votes of no confidences in some of the Boards, and have resulted in a level of distrust and resentment between students, faculty, and staff and our Administrations and Boards of Trustees.

I believe that the changes outlined in SB 273 will be a critical step in starting to rebuild trust, bringing our campus communities closer to the governance of our public universities, and unifying us in the collective goal of having a strong post-secondary education system in Oregon.

Within the changes outlined in SB 273, the Oregon Student Association has been particularly focused on the experience of the undergraduate student trustee, the lack of graduate student membership on the Board, and the selection process of trustees. Further, we welcome the inclusion of the transparency and accountability mechanisms that will ensure the Boards are being communicative and responsive to the campus community.

Being the undergraduate student trustee is a tremendously difficult task. We believe the addition of another undergraduate student trustee, with each student trustee serving staggered terms, will ensure that there will always be a more experienced student trustee and less experienced student trustee on the Board at all times. This will allow a level of mentorship and collaboration between the trustees that will be a helpful built-in support from the start of a student trustee's term of office.

Graduate students, who contribute so much to our campuses, having a seat at the table to us is a no-brainer. We are excited for this to be included in SB 273.

Finally, we are thrilled to see part of this bill address the selection process. This is a critical piece of this bill that will address the ongoing issue of campus stakeholder groups being highly disconnected from the selection process. The process outlined will formalize and help establish a direct line between campus stakeholder groups and the Governor's office, to ensure that the Governor has all the information she needs when considering appointments to the Board.

To conclude, the Oregon Student Association enthusiastically supports SB 273 with the -1 Amendment. We appreciate Senator Dembrow for being a champion for this work, and appreciate Senator Frederick, Representative McLain, Representative Evans, and all the many members of the workgroup. It has been an enormous feat to find consensus around governance reform. If I am being completely honest, we would have liked to see this bill going even further, we have made many compromises already, and our hope is that our partners in this work will do the same. Anything less than this, will comprise us reaching our collective goal in a meaningful way. We want something that works for everyone, and SB 273 with the -1 Amendment in its current version will do just that.