

Date 2/28/23

Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair  
Senate Education Committee  
900 Court St NE, S-407  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 523, which clarifies that the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) may authorize community colleges to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. This bill is crucial for improving educational opportunities for nursing students across Oregon, particularly in rural areas where healthcare deserts are prevalent.

Community colleges play a vital role in providing accessible and affordable education to students. With the passing of Senate Bill 3 in 2019, community colleges were given the ability to offer applied baccalaureate degrees (AB) with the authorization of HECC. However, community colleges need additional statutory language to offer BSN degrees, which is the only baccalaureate degree recognized by the nursing industry.

Senate Bill 523 would allow community colleges to offer BSN degrees, providing students with a lower cost option to attain higher-level skills in their field. This would increase access to 4-year nursing degrees, giving students more opportunities for promotion and higher pay. Additionally, it would provide an additional local option for RN graduates to continue their education with familiar faculty, learning environments, and student supports.

Moreover, an RN to BSN program from a community college would create more equitable outcomes for underserved, often marginalized populations. Education from community colleges is a more accessible and affordable option, making it an ideal choice for students from diverse backgrounds.

This bill would also address local healthcare workforce needs by giving more students the credentials they need (a BSN) to continue on to a master's degree (MSN), which is required to teach at the RN level. A shortage of nursing educators is one of the key chokepoints in the postsecondary nursing pipeline. By providing more opportunities for nursing students to attain a BSN, Oregon can help address the nursing shortage and improve healthcare outcomes.

In conclusion, I strongly support Senate Bill 523 as it would provide better, more equitable opportunities for nursing students and address local healthcare workforce needs. I urge the Education Committee to pass this bill and support the development of a community college BSN program in Oregon.

Thank you for considering my views.

Sincerely,

Brad Christopher RN, BSN

Faculty Instructor LCC Health Professions

40225 Booth Kelly Rd.

Springfield, OR 97475