

March 2, 2023

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber and Members of the Committee,
My name is Jessica Howard and I am the president of Chemeketa Community College.

The first thing I'd like to say today is how grateful community colleges are to our university partners with whom we work diligently to create seamless transfer arrangements. We know this is what many students need to be successful. But not all of our students take this path – it is not a good choice for them, or they simply can't because of factors outside of their control. And now I'm speaking of our nursing students, who graduate from colleges like Chemeketa, take the national exam very successfully to become an RN, and then, in many cases, enter the workforce and don't go on to get a BSN. At Chemeketa, this is the case for the majority of our nursing graduates. And evidence shows that increasing the proportion of bachelor-prepared nurses is better for nurses, creates better health outcomes for patients, and meets a pressing workforce need.

It has been suggested that OCNE (the Oregon Consortium of Nursing Education) presents a solution to this problem. This is simply not true, because the problem is neither shared curricula nor a lack of transfer arrangements – which work well for a portion of students – but rather something far more foundational and personal, and which requires an equity lens to see: the reasons we don't have more RNs getting a BSN is because of the situations experienced by students who don't have every advantage or don't fit the mold – rural students, students of color, student parents, older students, and students without means – the students that CCs disproportionately (and proudly) serve. Obvious reasons the BSN is not pursued include the significant cost at the university level, concerns with learning primarily online (unless a student were to actually physically relocate – a huge and impractical undertaking for many), and the disinclination to enroll, navigate, and attend in a new, unknown, and historically marginalizing learning environment.

We know there are powerful voices advocating for the status quo, and we hope that you will hear the voices of our students, our communities, and our health care partners who are lining up in support of SB 523, and I'm referring to the emails and written testimony you have received. Our students have also contributed testimony in support, because of course this bill is about them.

I urge you to support SB523. It presents a tremendous opportunity to make real our state's commitment to educational equity, and it will create more of the nurses our communities desperately need.

Thank you, and thank you for your service to our state.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Howard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "H" and "Q" at the end.

Jessica Howard
President/CEO