

Submitter: Rob Fullmer  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure: SB5506

For the record, my name is Rob Fullmer. I live in Portland. My testimony is about higher education, an area to which I have committed my life and career. Oregon is currently near the bottom of the fifty states when it comes to the percentage of its budget committed to higher education. Since measure 5 passed in the 90s, the trend for state investment in our future through funding higher education has trended disastrously downward, and now students are paying nearly three quarters of the cost of their degrees. This budget as proposed will make that situation worse.

Prospective students of Oregon's higher education system are cost conscious. For the past decade they have had to carefully weigh the price of college against any potential earnings benefit they expect they'll enjoy - if they manage to get a degree - versus the lost wages and time they spend earning one. It's been a close call, but more and more of them had been deciding to forgo the degree in favor of work experience and compensation. With a tight labor market and record inflation, there are a lot of jobs out there that are paying wages that make the calculation for those coming into adulthood an easy one - college is not in their plans. It is now too expensive to be worth it to them, a situation which will only worsen as tuition spikes - because the both the governor's and ways and means co-chairs' budgets don't fund even current service levels. Once inflation is accounted for the community colleges and regional universities are looking at a sea of red ink and a further attenuation of high quality wraparound services that are essential for many of the students at these institutions to succeed.

The community colleges and regional universities, which includes Portland State University for the greater Portland metro region, are seeing their enrollment nosedive, with catastrophic consequences for programming and staffing. You've all likely read about the retrenchment taking place at Southern Oregon University and may have heard about the previous PSU president's announced plan to significantly reduce staffing. This is just the beginning of what will assuredly be a precipitous downhill slide.

I have served on the state's Higher Education Coordinating Commission. I've participated as a member of both the recent higher education governance task force and the under-represented student success task force. I've been working in higher education for the last 30 years, and over the last eighteen I've been watching Oregon higher education unravel before my eyes.

To be clear, the University of Oregon and Oregon State University are going to be fine. They are name brands, attract lucrative out of state students, and for historical reasons get relatively generous state allocations given the other resources they have access to. The community colleges and technical and regional - again, including PSU

- universities are in real trouble. Failing to invest in a targeted way now to address this will lay the groundwork for an even bigger crisis down the line. We know from the data that having a viable state higher education system is a huge driver of a successful state economy. As it stands, Oregon is on track to not have such a system in most of the state.