



April 24, 2023

Dear Chair Lively, Vice-Chair McIntire, and Vice-Chair Ruiz,

I am writing to strongly encourage the members of the Oregon House Committee on Higher Education to support SB 523. This legislation will empower community colleges to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) if they meet the necessary requirements. A community college option for earning a BSN degree would increase access to 4-year nursing degrees across Oregon and particularly in rural areas. This in turn will help to address Oregon's statewide health professional shortage.

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) needs additional statutory language to clarify that they may approve a Bachelor of Science in Nursing at a community college. This bill would address that statutory need. Without the BSN, Oregon community colleges would otherwise have to title our post-RN degrees as a Bachelor of Applied Science in Nursing. However, the nursing industry does not recognize this degree, and so students with such degrees would be wasting their time and money obtaining a degree that is not valid to employers or nursing boards. Currently, many community college RN graduates are paying more expensive out-of-state, online providers to attain a recognized BSN. Local community college alternatives would provide a valuable lower cost option.

With SB 523, Oregon BSN graduates would save money and have more guaranteed in-state opportunities for higher pay and career advancement. In rural areas — where there are well-documented so-called "health care deserts" — a viable local and affordable option for nursing students to obtain credentials and educationally advance is critical to meeting our health care needs.

Community colleges in Oregon have the capacity to offer the RN to BSN pathway, and we are ready to do so if authorized by the state and upon meeting all necessary requirements. SB 523 is an investment in Oregon's health care professionals and long-term quality of care. I encourage all your members to support this important bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie Chesley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Laurie Chesley
President
Central Oregon Community College
president@cocc.edu | 541-383-7201