OCCA Testimony in Support of SB 523
April 25th, 2023

Chair Lively members of the committee, for the record I'm John Wykoff, Deputy Director of the Oregon Community College Association representing Oregon's 17 community colleges. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of SB 523.

In 2019, the Legislature passed SB 3 authorizing community colleges to offer applied baccalaureate programs, which are basically extensions existing career and technical education associate degrees including programs such information technology, advanced manufacturing, or healthcare professions such as nursing.

These degrees are developed to provide students with advanced technical knowledge, strengthen analytical skills, enhance communication skills and broaden students' awareness through interdisciplinary topics. The skills embedded in the baccalaureate extensions of career and technical education give students greater opportunity for better employment opportunities, pay and career advancement. They are also aimed at meeting specific local workforce needs.

In response to the passage of SB 3, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) engaged stakeholders in a process to determine the parameters under which community colleges could offer a baccalaureate extension of Associate Degrees in Nursing - commonly referred to as an RN degree.

One of the issues that surfaced in that process was that the nomenclature of the program in nursing was highly relevant for the degree to be useful for students. Hospitals, nursing boards and the healthcare industry generally do not recognize a Bachelor of Applied Science in Nursing. It would also be considered a terminal degree meaning student could not use it to go on and get a master's degree, which is required to be a nursing educator – one of the major chokepoints in the nursing education pipeline.

During this process, the HECC later determined that further legislation would be needed for colleges to be able to offer the standard four-year nursing degree – a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, or a BSN. SB 523 addresses this issue by clarifying that the HECC would be authorizing BSN degrees just as other states offering community college BSN degrees have done.

OCCA believes SB 523 is about providing localized choices at an affordable price that will meet the diverse needs of students and communities across Oregon. Across the country we see that students who enroll in community college baccalaureate programs are highly diverse. Many have attended college before, and some have completed an associate degree before starting their community college program.

Today most colleges find that a large majority of their ADN students do not go on to get a BSN. Of those who do, many are also choosing online out-of-state providers. We believe students and the state would be better served if those students had an affordable local option. We also see SB 523 as a potential path for those students who are not taking advantage of current options or are seeking higher cost options leading to significant student debt.

Community college baccalaureate such as a BSN have also been shown to serve more underrepresented and non-traditional students than their traditional 4-year counterparts.

A 2022 study looking at community college baccalaureate (CCB) programs in Washington and Florida showed that Florida CCB graduates were 57 percent female, 42 percent were people of color, and 47 percent were 30 or older. Students who enroll in Washington's CCB programs are older than other community college students—32 years of age, on average, compared to 23 for Washington community college students overall. In some areas, students in CCB programs in Washington mirror other community college students, but they are older and more likely to have dependents, be veterans, and receive financial assistance.

According to a recent analysis conducted by Bragg and Associates looking at 2021 enrollment data, six Oregon Community Colleges have a higher percentage of Hispanic graduates than the highest university program at 16 percent with 6 colleges ranging from 20 to 32 percent. The report also shows that only Mt Hood Community College, Sumner and Warner Pacific reported to 10-11 percent of black nursing graduates with zero or very small percentage of black graduates at all other 2 and 4-year Oregon programs. Only 6 indigenous RN graduates were reported statewide showing, as a state, we still have a long way to go in bridging equity gaps in nursing education. Colleges believe an alternate pathway can be a part of those efforts.

SB 523 also addresses some of the current structural disadvantages for community colleges and their students built into the current system of nursing education delivery in Oregon. The first is that SB 523 would allow for colleges to more easily build curriculum for the second two years that would more directly address the local needs of their communities. Another issue here is program sustainability. An ADN program is typically the most expensive program offered by a college. Because community college students finish their two-year program with a nursing license, these programs include intensive hands-on and clinical training, and the state nursing board mandates a ratio of no more than 8 students to one instructor further increasing the cost of the program.

By contrast the second two years in this two-plus-two model are larger and much less costly lecture courses with much less clinical time which is heavily represented in the first two years. Offering the second two years would make college programs more sustainable and increase the likelihood that a college could expand their ADN programs with additional cohorts. As it stands, colleges perennially struggle to maintain ADN programs and often cut other programs and services to support nursing.

OCCA believes SB 523 is an important but incremental step to providing broader access to bachelor's level nursing programs and better career opportunities for students across the state. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I'd be happy to take any questions.