



April 26, 2023

House Committee on Higher Education
Oregon State Legislature
Re: SB 269

Dear Chair Lively, Vice Chairs McIntire and Ruiz, Committee Members:

I am writing in support of SB269 (and SBs 270 and 1082) in my role as Director of the University of Oregon's Prison Education Program, which is the largest of its kind in our state. Our program offers a range of opportunities – extending from college degrees to one-off lectures and activities, to as wide and large a portion of those incarcerated in Oregon's prisons as possible. As it currently stands, the Oregon Department of Corrections does not list Higher Education as a priority, and it is thus not a part of the "landscape" in the way that G.E.D. and some other programs are (see for example ORS 421.084, which deals with education in the DOC and does not mention "higher education", and provisions of Measure 17, which requires work but does not include higher education in that category). University and college-based educators thus do not have "a seat at the table" when it comes to planning for and implementing services and programs for those who are incarcerated.

We are eager for the MOU resulting from this Bill to shift the relationship between education providers and the DOC, and believe that such a shift will allow for more work to be done with fewer institutional complications that currently make things challenging on both sides of the prison walls.

We hope for legislative support to:

- Expand existing programs and facilitate greater collaboration between programs, and appropriate additional funding for new and current institutional program development including equity for incarcerated women
- Foster collaboration on information sharing of opportunities for various kinds of education: non-credit, vocational, credit non-degree, and degree-granting opportunities
- Create a standing educational committee with membership including colleges/universities, the HECC, DOC, and re-entry service providers
- Address staffing, materials, technology, security, and space needs to accomplish these goals in both the DOC and the HECC

- Improve programs both on campus and in our communities to promote successful re-entry for those released from incarceration

At this time is important to note both the opportunities and challenges that will come with renewed availability of Pell Grant funds, while adhering to the Federal Department of Education's directive that Pell Funding "supplement rather than supplant" existing funding for Higher Education in prisons. We also affirm the broad liberal arts approach to education in prisons that accords with the "career competencies" listed as most necessary by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

As documented in the Federal Register [DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 34 CFR Parts 600, 668, and 690 [Docket ID ED-2022-OPE-0062] RIN 1840-AD54, 1840-AD55, 1840-AD66, 1840-AD69], only two percent of those who are incarcerated in Federal and State prisons are participating in higher education. Research has shown that even basic participation in higher education by those in prisons has myriad benefits, including reduced recidivism, increased public safety, cost savings, and a more skilled workforce. We are eager to make educational opportunities more inclusive, extensive, and effective in our state's prisons, and SBs 269, 270, and 1082 are a step in the right direction.

We appreciate your attention to these matters, and are happy to provide any follow-up that will assist in pursuing these goals.

Sincerely,

Shaul Cohen

Prof. Shaul Cohen
Director, UO Prison Education Program