



Legislative Testimony

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

April 27, 2023

The Honorable John Lively, Chair
House Committee on Higher Education

Subject: Senate Bill 270 A

Chair Lively and members of the committee, my name is Larry Bennett, and I serve as Assistant Director of the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) Correctional Services Division. I am providing neutral testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 270.

What the Bill Does:

The A-engrossed version of SB 270 would allow DOC to enter into agreements with community colleges, post-secondary distance education academic programs, and other post-secondary academic programs provided the program is consistent with DOC administrative rules and regulations and federal Pell Grant regulations, as applicable.

Background and Impacts:

With the arrival of Pell Grant eligibility for individuals in custody starting in July 2023, DOC and its higher-education partners are eager to implement access to post-secondary education in DOC prisons. The intent of this bill is to allow students eligible for Pell Grants to enroll in post-secondary education opportunities other than those offered by the community college serving the area in which their institution is located.

You may not be aware that the federal government regulations for Pell Grant prison education programs issued in October 2022 are burdensome on our education partners. These regulations are delaying their ability to be ready to provide post-secondary Pell Grant education programs when the grants are reinstated in July 2023. Further, each education partner must complete the Pell Grant eligibility requirements for every DOC institution in which they would like to provide programs. Because of the labor-intensive application process, many education institutions across the U.S. will not be ready to begin this fall. Some of our Oregon education institutions have already expressed their unwillingness to complete all the onerous requirements. Of those willing to complete the federal requirements – such as Portland State University, Treasure Valley Community College, and Portland Community College at our pilot online education program sites – time is also needed for each education program to work with DOC's IT department to ensure their program's Learning Management System (LMS) is secure and compatible with DOC systems. Even with all parties' dedicated investment of time and effort, not every willing post-secondary education institution will be able to become a federally approved available option for AIC students as one of the "academic program(s) at any

community college,” “post-secondary distance education academic program,” or “any other post-secondary academic program that the adult in custody applies for and is accepted into” as proposed in the bill. The A-engrossed version of SB 270 allows for the time it will take for each party to work through all the Pell Grant requirements.

The A-engrossed version of SB 270 also takes into account DOC’s limited education staff resources. As much as DOC would like to expand the post-secondary education opportunities in its institutions, DOC does not have the staff needed to offer new post-secondary educational programs at every facility. Except for our pilot program locations, there are currently no DOC educational staff at any of our facilities. SB 1522 (2022) provided DOC with two educational staff for both pilot online education programs at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and Snake River Correctional Institution – one to supervise the computer lab for online college classes and the other one to be able to work with the colleges and coordinate both online and in person classes, do call outs for students, and coordinate classroom times and space. Without similar staffing at the remaining ten institutions, DOC will be limited in its ability to allow students to enroll and participate in the education programs identified in this bill.

DOC fully supports offering post-secondary programming at all of its facilities and is diligently working with its education partners to help them process through the Pell Grant regulations. The A-engrossed version of the bill will not only allow DOC to engage with education providers outside of the correctional institution’s local community college geographical district, but it will also allow DOC to operate within the constraints of its institution education staffing as well as comply with the federal Pell Grant requirements to select education programs that are in the best interests of its students.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Submitted by:

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