

To Chair Lively, Vice Chairs, members of the House Committee on Higher Education -

My name is Farallon Broughton and I am a Graduate Employee at Oregon State University. I am a fifth-year PhD candidate and have been pursuing my graduate degree at the university since 2017; I have taught upper-division undergraduate courses in ecology, systematics, and conservation biology for most of that time. I have previously served as the elected President of the Coalition of Graduate Employees, the labor union representing 1,800 graduate teaching and research assistants at our university, as well as in many other roles and capacities within our union through the years. I currently serve as the elected Secretary of the American Federation of Teachers – Oregon, a labor federation representing over 18,000 educators, educational professionals and staff, and healthcare and nonprofit workers across the state. I'm writing today to express my strongest support for HB 4125 because public universities should be by and for the public – and Oregon State University currently is not accountable to the public good nor to public oversight.

OSU has undergone a dramatic shift since the passage Senate Bill 270 in 2013 towards being a private, corporatized institution that is more interested in endless expansion and profit than in serving the residents of our state and providing high-quality education. In my seven years of service at this university, I have seen working conditions and treatment of university employees decline catastrophically. Skyrocketing tuition and class sizes, escalating student debt, and salary far below a living wage are creating conditions that are not just untenable for students and workers pursuing an education, but that fundamentally cannot sustain a decent life.

My labor union and my fellow workers have tried for years to engage the OSU Board of Trustees on many different issues, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, racial and transphobic bias in campus policing and policy, and working conditions. We have consistently encountered a Board of Trustees system that is not transparent, that does not represent university workers and students, and that continually makes unilateral decisions without involving critical stakeholders at detriment to the function and purpose of the university. I provided testimony on the urgent need for Board of Trustees reform to the Oregon state senate in April of 2023. While SB273A passed, we are already seeing the Graduate Employee trustee representation it guarantees co-opted by the university, and current language is not sufficient to ensure labor unions can field Graduate Employee trustees who are qualified to represent our bargaining unit and who have workers' interests at heart, instead of OSU's cherry-picked "representatives".

Where is the state of Oregon in this? Why is OSU allowed to continue this unsustainable and exploitative business model? Why do the students, teachers, and workers who make this university run still have no meaningful power to govern our institution? Where are Oregon's public universities headed in this race to the bottom, and what will the impact be on the public?

A full decade after the state chose to decentralize public universities, we need a thorough and data-driven review to ensure that deregulated universities aren't becoming privatized, profit-obsessed institutions that have no regard for the public good or educational quality. We need to understand their profit motives and financial entanglements, as well as gather data on

how the workforce (the core of education) has been impacted. A rigorous study will inform what our options are to keep building our state stronger.

The many thousands of educators and students across the Oregon public universities dream of a system that is affordable and accessible. This dream is impossible without fair compensation and safe working conditions for the brilliant researchers, instructors, and classified staff who serve the universities. A functional public university system would prioritize long-term retention of this valuable brain-trust and ensure a career of service to our communities is financially possible. This is the common direction we all want and need.

The study proposed by House Bill 4125 will provide us with the data and knowledge we need to move towards a more accountable and sustainable public university system – one which will provide affordable high-quality education for decades to come. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to vote Yes on HB 4125. Thank you.