



# American Association of University Professors

*Academic Freedom for a Free Society*

Representative Lively, Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education  
Oregon State Capitol  
Salem, OR 97301

February 6, 2024

Re: House Bill 4125 - Support  
Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs McIntire, Ruiz, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the more than 6,300 members of the American Association of University Professors in Oregon, our collective bargaining chapters at the University of Oregon, Portland State University, Oregon State University, and Oregon Institute of Technology, and our faculty members across Oregon, we urge you to support HB 4125.

When the Oregon legislature enacted SB 242 in 2011 and SB 270 in 2013, the prevailing belief was that by instituting individual boards at the seven public universities, each institution would be empowered to better respond to emergent issues and at the same time would have greater accountability to students, staff, faculty, and other members of the community. The hope was that more access to student, staff, and faculty perspectives would help guide board decisions and improve how Oregon's public institutions operate.

More than a decade since, it is time for the Oregon legislature to investigate whether the optimism of 2013 has in fact borne out, and the study proposed in HB 4125 is central to answering this important question.

From my experience first as a faculty member at Oregon State University from 2011-2022 and subsequently as Executive Director of AAUP Oregon, I can say that many of our public universities are facing even greater challenges now than they were a decade ago, and the promise of institutional boards is not reflected in the actual impact they have had on their individual institutions.

Since 2013, tuition and the resultant student debt to pay that tuition have exploded, and an undue amount of this revenue has gone to fund ballooning upper administrative costs. Meanwhile, faculty and staff wages and working conditions have been greatly diminished in the last 10 years. Our wages are stagnating behind record inflation, our full-time positions are facing adjunctification, and when our colleagues vacate a position, the burden falls to those who remain to do more with less. Faculty and staff working conditions directly impact student learning conditions, and the choices made by administrators and backed by institutional boards have left us in our present state.

Rather than creating an environment of collaboration and collegiality, any access that students, staff, or faculty have managed to establish with their institutional boards has come from hard won battles to establish legislative

solutions that obligate the institutions to hear from us. We need only look at legislation like SB 854 in 2021 and SB 273 in 2023 to see the measures that members of the university community have had to take to gain a greater voice and be heard by their institutional boards.

The prevailing experience of many student, staff, and faculty organizations is that institutional boards show greater deference to the university administration than any other group on campus. One example of this from my time at Oregon State University was the way that OSU's board of trustees handled the community outrage over former president F. King Alexander's leadership. Alexander was hired in a clandestine fashion that did not adequately include the university community's input or perspective. Then, when the [Husch Blackwell report](#) was released outlining his inappropriate handling of Title IX cases at his previous position, the institutional board closed ranks in support of the beleaguered president rather than listen to the perspectives of the rest of the university community. The combined effort of OSU's labor unions, faculty senate, student government, and advocacy groups and the ensuing interest from local and national media, was required for the board to take action and remove Alexander.

Oregonians deserve a public university system that provides accessible, affordable, high-quality education to any person who chooses to pursue it. This goal can not be met in the present state of our public universities. As a result of the implementation of individual institutional boards, the institutions have been set in competition against one another. It is clear that our public universities will need greater support in the next biennium and beyond, and in order to wisely invest those funds, we must examine the present state of our institutions and determine the best path forward. HB 4125 can ensure that we have the information necessary to make wise decisions with public funds for the good of every Oregonian who chooses to follow their dreams by pursuing higher education.

Thank you for your consideration.

Victor Reyes  
Executive Director of AAUP Oregon