



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in support of HB 4125

February 6, 2024

Thank you Chair Lively, Vice Chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and members of the committee,

My name is Farrah Chaichi and I am the Representative from District 35, which is Beaverton and Aloha. I'm here today to urge your support for House Bill 4125, which calls for a much-needed study to assess important aspects of our current public university ecosystem. Across all 36 counties and in every region of our state, across races, cultures, and backgrounds, many Oregonians want our families to experience the benefits of our public higher education resources. Higher education is deeply tied into our individual and collective dreams and aspirations for achieving a better life for ourselves and our families.

Education, and especially higher education, is woven into the fabric of our democracy, as a place where people can explore our interests, hone new skills, become informed citizens, and pursue both career and personal goals. Higher education by its very nature is **rooted in community and mentorship**, with a tenure system designed to develop and retain subject matter experts who will develop future generations in the classroom. Whether through the GI bill after World War II or in our current moment, higher education is seen as **an investment in our future - and an investment in our society.**

The study in HB 4125 will help us identify priority areas for smart investments, improvements, and deeper insight into Oregon's public university system, with a keen focus on the past ten years.

In 2011, the Legislature passed SB 242, beginning our shift in state higher education governance away from the centralized Oregon University System, Board of Higher Education, and Chancellor model. SB 270 in 2013 and SB 80 in 2015 finalized our change to the new system consisting of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) and individual, private governing boards for each of our seven public universities. It has been approximately 10 years since that change, and our legislature was given a clear mandate in SB270: the "responsibility to monitor the success of governing boards at fulfilling their missions, their compacts, and the principles stated in this section."



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While we do have some data from:

- 1) The 2022 National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) Landscape Study, and
- 2) The 2022 Association of Governing Boards Review, which reviewed governance structure shortfalls and areas for improvement

We still do not have comprehensive data on the general structural effects or costs of decentralization (fiscal impact), or the impacts and outcomes (both financial and non-financial) on the health of our public universities and our state as a whole. ORS 325.025 requires public university governing boards to “act in the best interests of both the university and the State of Oregon as a whole.” The comprehensive study we are requesting today is needed to determine the ways that our recently-decentralized system is or is not meeting this core requirement. It is more important than ever, especially to our constituents, that we look at how these kinds of decisions affect us with a statewide lens.

The 2022 Landscape Study performed by NCHEMS included several conclusions relevant to the study we are requesting today. Most notably that “[T]he state’s universities, particularly the research universities, must be central players in creating the state’s new economy, and they require adequate support and appropriate, well-coordinated priming and inducements to do so.” The Landscape Study also revealed that while institutions are willing to engage in administrative and academic collaboration there is a lack of infrastructure to facilitate that collaboration. They also recommended that we take “steps to ensure that the state’s policy leaders and its institutions of higher education are pursuing a common and widely agreed upon set of priorities for improving the economy and quality of life for the benefit of the residents of Oregon[.]”

The study requested in our bill today is a necessary next step to ensuring that we have defined data to inform an agreed upon set of priorities and to provide further guidance in statute. This study will lay the critical groundwork for understanding where we are and where we need to go, creating a much-needed roadmap as we undertake future investments in higher-ed.



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The need for coordination and collaboration among our public universities provides the context of the need for a deeper understanding of our current higher education governance model's capacity for meeting these needs for the future of our state, for Oregonians, and for our economy upon which we all rely.

The study areas include analysis of ten-year trends (adjusted for inflation) of:

- Tuition and student debt
- Enrollment
- Educational attainment
- Costs of common barriers (housing, food)
- Percentage of classes taught by full-time versus part-time faculty
- Percentage change in administrative costs
- Employment trends for the higher ed workforce
- Institutional finance and endowment metrics
- Campus-Community relations
- Strengths of our current structure
- Comparative utility of alternative governance models used nationwide

Our bill has an amendment being finalized that integrates the valuable input from LPRO, the HECC, our colleagues, and subject matter experts in higher education. And I just want to thank the HECC and others for taking the time to ensure that this bill is useful and productive.

With the clearer picture HB 4125 will provide, we can ensure the most efficient and effective use of our universities to meet our current and future needs. I urge your yes vote on HB 4125 with a "do pass" recommendation.

Respectfully,

Representative Farrah Chaichi
House District 35,
Beaverton & Aloha