

HB 3634 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce Development

Prepared By: Ellen O'Brien, LPRO Analyst

Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 3/4

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure establishes the Water Workforce Program in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to make grants for workforce development initiatives for the water and wastewater utilities sector. The measure requires HECC to provide grants to local workforce development boards and those boards to administer the program to achieve specified purposes. It requires HECC and any grant fund recipients to enter into an agreement indicating the purposes of the funds and outlining reporting requirements. It requires HECC to report to the Legislative Assembly every two years on the outcomes of the Water Workforce Program. The measure appropriates \$5.5 million to HECC for distribution to local workforce development boards, requires HECC to distribute funds within 90 days of the measure's effective date, and declares an emergency, effective on passage.

Detailed Summary

- Establishes the Water Workforce Program in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to operate workforce development initiatives for the water and wastewater utilities sector.
- Requires HECC to provide grants to local workforce development boards and those boards to administer the program.
- Specifies purposes of the program, including:
 - Identifying state and regional barriers to and pathways for careers in the water and wastewater utilities workforce.
 - Developing regionally specific strategies for addressing water and wastewater workforce needs.
 - Partnering with nonprofit organizations to conduct outreach to environmental justice communities with connections to water and wastewater utilities.
 - Identifying and implementing strategies to attract, recruit, retain, and replace water and wastewater utility operators.
 - Coordinating with state and regional partners to expand community-based partnerships.
 - Developing education and training pathways.
 - Providing wraparound supports and services, including tuition and fee assistance for industry-recognized certificates.
 - Engaging with federally recognized tribal governments to address water and wastewater utility needs.
 - Funding investments in staff, equipment and technology, and administrative costs.
 - Working with community colleges and nonprofit organizations to develop pilot programs for paid on-the-job training and job placement services.
- Requires HECC and any grant fund recipients to enter into an agreement specifying the purposes of the funds and reporting requirements.
- Permits local workforce development boards to distribute grant funds to nonprofit organizations and community colleges.
- Requires HECC to report to the Legislative Assembly every two years, beginning on September 15, 2026, on the outcomes of the Water Workforce Program
- Permits HECC to adopt rules necessary to carry out the Water Workforce Program.
- Requires HECC to distribute funds to local workforce development boards within 90 days of the effective date of the measure.
- Appropriates \$5.5 million to HECC for distribution to local workforce development boards.

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- Declares an emergency, effective on passage.

FISCAL: May have fiscal impact, but no statement yet issued.

REVENUE: May have revenue impact, but no statement yet issued.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Local workforce development boards are a system of business-led boards in all fifty states that are funded by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). In Oregon, there are nine local workforce development boards, as well as a statewide Workforce & Talent Development Board, which is tasked with advising the Governor on workforce matters and developing a strategic plan for workforce development. The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) is the primary agency responsible for administering both state and federal workforce development grant programs in Oregon, and provides staff support to the Workforce and Talent Development Board.

Water systems operators for wastewater and for drinking water are certified by separate agencies in Oregon. The [Oregon Department of Environmental Quality \(DEQ\)](#) administers the Wastewater Operator Certification Program, which certifies domestic wastewater system operators, who manage sewage systems. Oregon Drinking Water Services (DWS) at the [Oregon Health Authority \(OHA\)](#) separately administers the certification program for drinking water system operators.

Each biennium, OHA and DEQ submit a joint report to the Legislative Assembly on [Certification Programs for Water and Wastewater System Operators](#). The most recent report, published January 2025, provides information and updates on the two certification programs, as well as data on the number of certificates and systems requiring certified operators.