

A-Engrossed
House Bill 3634

Ordered by the House April 14
Including House Amendments dated April 914

Sponsored by Representatives OWENS, HELM, MCLAIN; Representatives MCDONALD, WRIGHT, Senators ANDERSON, WEBER

SUMMARY

The following summary is not prepared by the sponsors of the measure and is not a part of the body thereof subject to consideration by the Legislative Assembly. It is an editor's brief statement of the essential features of the measure. The statement includes a measure digest written in compliance with applicable readability standards.

Digest: The Act makes new laws with respect to workforce development activities with respect to the water workforce. The Act takes effect when the Governor signs it. (Flesch Readability Score: 63.4).

Establishes the Water Workforce Program in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to support workforce development initiatives within the water workforce.

Directs the commission to award grants to local workforce development boards to administer the program. *[Requires the commission to disburse funds appropriated for the purpose of administering the program to local workforce development boards within a certain timeline.]* **Requires the commission and local workforce development boards to consult with certain entities to establish a process and criteria for distributing moneys to certain subgrantees and entities that participate in certain workforce development activities. Requires the commission and the boards to establish the process and criteria within a certain timeline.**

Declares an emergency, effective on passage.

A BILL FOR AN ACT

Relating to the water workforce; and declaring an emergency.

Be It Enacted by the People of the State of Oregon:

SECTION 1. (1) As used in this section:

(a) **"Environmental justice community" has the meaning given that term in ORS 182.535.**

(b) **"Nonprofit organization" means an organization that is described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and that is exempt from income tax under section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code.**

(2) **The Water Workforce Program is established in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to increase and diversify the supply of skilled water professionals within the water workforce through workforce development initiatives that include, but are not limited to, providing education and training opportunities to individuals seeking entry into the following sectors:**

(a) **Water and wastewater utilities and related industries.**

(b) **Water science, engineering and technology.**

(3) **The commission shall oversee, and local workforce development boards as defined in ORS 660.300 shall implement, the program. The commission shall provide grants to local workforce development boards to administer the program for the following purposes:**

(a) **To identify and address solutions, at the state and regional level, for eliminating barriers to and leveraging opportunities for developing and sustaining pathways that connect individuals to career opportunities within the water workforce, with particular focus on the**

NOTE: Matter in **boldfaced** type in an amended section is new; matter *[italic and bracketed]* is existing law to be omitted. New sections are in **boldfaced** type.

1 sectors described under subsection (2) of this section, by examining factors that include, but
2 are not limited to:

3 (A) Current education and training pathways for individuals to enter the water
4 workforce;

5 (B) Opportunities for building partnerships and sharing resources between water and
6 wastewater utilities and other industries experiencing a shortage of skilled water profes-
7 sionals;

8 (C) The barriers encountered by individuals seeking entry into the water workforce and
9 the opportunities to address those barriers;

10 (D) The barriers encountered by industries experiencing a shortage of skilled water pro-
11 fessionals and the opportunities to address those barriers; and

12 (E) Other factors deemed relevant by the local workforce development boards.

13 (b) To develop regionally specific strategies for addressing water workforce needs, with
14 a focus on the water and wastewater utilities sector.

15 (c) To provide funding to nonprofit organizations, high schools, community colleges,
16 public universities and other entities for the development and operation of water and
17 wastewater utilities training, education and apprenticeship programs that are designed to do
18 the following:

19 (A) Provide paid on-the-job career and education pathways for obtaining operator certif-
20 ications for water and wastewater systems;

21 (B) Engage with water and wastewater utilities to explore and identify potential options
22 to provide financial support to on-the-job career and education pathways for individuals to
23 obtain employment in the water and wastewater utilities sector;

24 (C) Facilitate partnerships with water and wastewater utilities experiencing skilled
25 workforce shortages to provide job placement services to program participants; and

26 (D) Identify potential sources for sustainable funding to support the programs.

27 (d) To partner with nonprofit organizations that serve environmental justice communi-
28 ties to conduct targeted outreach to such communities, promoting awareness of career op-
29 portunities within the water workforce, with a focus on the water and wastewater utilities
30 sector. Priority shall be given to organizations that have demonstrated knowledge and expe-
31 rience with and an established connection to water and wastewater utilities.

32 (e) To identify and implement strategies to attract, recruit, retain and replace water and
33 wastewater utility operators and support succession planning in rural, coastal and remote
34 communities and communities with limited funding and workforce capacity.

35 (f) To coordinate with state workforce agencies and regional workforce development
36 partners to expand community-based partnerships that aim to support and sustain water
37 workforce development initiatives.

38 (g) To develop education and training pathways within the water workforce, including but
39 not limited to:

40 (A) Apprenticeship opportunities; and

41 (B) Opportunities that provide paid work experience, including stipends and wages.

42 (h) To provide wraparound supports and services necessary to facilitate engagement in
43 the water workforce, including but not limited to tuition assistance and fee assistance to
44 obtain industry-recognized certificates.

45 (i) To engage and coordinate with federally recognized tribal governments in this state

1 to assess and address the water and wastewater utilities needs of federally recognized Indian
2 tribes in Oregon.

3 (j) To fund organizational investments, including but not limited to:

4 (A) Hiring staff;

5 (B) Purchasing equipment, technology and other training-related supplies; and

6 (C) Covering administrative costs.

7 (4) Prior to distributing any grant funds to a local workforce development board under
8 this section, the commission and the local workforce development board shall enter into an
9 agreement:

10 (a) Indicating the purposes for which the funds may be used; and

11 (b) Requiring the local workforce development board to report on the use of funds in a
12 manner described by the commission.

13 (5) A local workforce development board receiving a grant under this section may dis-
14 tribute grant funds to subgrantees that are:

15 (a) Nonprofit organizations that partner with the local workforce development board to
16 carry out the targeted outreach described in subsection (3)(d) of this section.

17 (b) Entities that partner with the local workforce development board to develop and op-
18 erate programs described in subsection (3)(c) of this section, with priority given to those
19 entities that operate established programs that meet the criteria described under subsection
20 (3)(c)(A) to (D) of this section.

21 (c) Entities that partner with local workforce development boards to carry out the ac-
22 tivities described under subsection (3) of this section.

23 (6) No later than September 15 of each even-numbered year, the Higher Education Co-
24 ordinating Commission shall submit a report to the interim committees of the Legislative
25 Assembly relating to labor and business, in the manner provided in ORS 192.254, on the
26 outcomes of the Water Workforce Program, including information reported by a grant re-
27 cipient, and any recommendations for legislation.

28 (7) The commission may adopt rules necessary to carry out the provisions of this section.

29 **SECTION 2.** In addition to and not in lieu of any other appropriation, there is appropri-
30 ated to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, for the biennium beginning July 1,
31 2025, out of the General Fund, the amount of \$3,500,000, to be distributed to local workforce
32 development boards for the purposes described under section 1 of this 2025 Act.

33 **SECTION 3.** (1) The Higher Education Coordinating Commission and local workforce de-
34 velopment boards shall consult with the following entities to establish a process and criteria
35 for distributing available moneys from funds appropriated to the commission to subgrantees
36 and entities that participate in carrying out the activities described in section 1 of this 2025
37 Act:

38 (a) Entities that are currently providing education and training pathways for entry into
39 the water workforce.

40 (b) Industries in need of skilled water professionals, with a focus on industries within the
41 water and wastewater utilities sector.

42 (2) The commission and the local workforce development boards shall establish the pro-
43 cess and criteria not later than the date that is six months after the effective date of this
44 2025 Act.

45 **SECTION 4.** The Higher Education Coordinating Commission shall submit the first report

1 required under section 1 (6) of this 2025 Act no later than September 15, 2026.

2 **SECTION 5.** This 2025 Act being necessary for the immediate preservation of the public
3 peace, health and safety, an emergency is declared to exist, and this 2025 Act takes effect
4 on its passage.

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