

House Bill 3634

Sponsored by Representatives OWENS, HELM, MCLAIN; Representative MCDONALD, 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 **as introduced**. 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.

Declares an emergency, effective on passage.

A BILL FOR AN ACT

1
2 Relating to the water workforce; and declaring an emergency.

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

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

4
5 (a) **“Environmental justice communities” has the meaning given that term in ORS**
6 **182.535.**

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

10 (2) **The Water Workforce Program is established in the Higher Education Coordinating**
11 **Commission to increase and diversify the supply of skilled water professionals within the**
12 **water workforce through workforce development initiatives that include, but are not limited**
13 **to, providing operator training and certification opportunities to individuals seeking entry**
14 **into the water and wastewater utilities sector and related industries.**

15 (3) **The commission shall operate and the local workforce development boards shall**
16 **manage the program. The commission shall provide grants to local workforce development**
17 **boards to administer the program for the following purposes:**

18 (a) **To identify and address solutions, at the state and regional level, for eliminating**
19 **barriers to and leveraging opportunities for developing and sustaining pathways that connect**
20 **individuals to career opportunities within the water and wastewater utilities sector by ex-**
21 **amining factors that include, but are not limited to:**

22 (A) **Current education and training pathways for individuals to enter the water and**
23 **wastewater utilities workforce;**

24 (B) **Opportunities for building partnerships and sharing resources between water and**
25 **wastewater utilities and related industries experiencing a shortage of skilled water profes-**
26 **sionals; and**

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 (C) Factors that impact the ability of water and wastewater utilities to attract, recruit,
2 retain and replace qualified water and wastewater utility operators.

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

5 (c) To partner with nonprofit organizations that serve environmental justice communi-
6 ties to conduct targeted outreach to such communities, promoting awareness of career op-
7 portunities in the water and wastewater utilities sector. Priority shall be given to
8 organizations that have demonstrated knowledge and experience with and an established
9 connection to water and wastewater utilities.

10 (d) To identify and implement strategies to attract, recruit, retain and replace water and
11 wastewater utility operators and support succession planning in rural, coastal and remote
12 communities and communities with limited funding and workforce capacity.

13 (e) To coordinate with state workforce agencies and regional workforce development
14 partners to expand community-based partnerships that aim to support and sustain water
15 workforce development initiatives.

16 (f) To develop education and training pathways within the water workforce, including but
17 not limited to:

18 (A) Apprenticeship opportunities; and

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

20 (g) To provide wraparound supports and services necessary to facilitate engagement in
21 the water workforce, including but not limited to tuition assistance and fee assistance to
22 obtain industry-recognized certificates.

23 (h) To engage and coordinate with federally recognized tribal governments to assess and
24 address the water and wastewater utilities needs of federally recognized Indian tribes in
25 Oregon.

26 (i) To fund organizational investments, including but not limited to:

27 (A) Hiring staff;

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

29 (C) Covering administrative costs.

30 (j) To work with community colleges and nonprofit organizations that provide water and
31 wastewater utilities training, education and apprenticeship programs to develop and operate
32 pilot programs that are designed to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

44 (b) Requiring the recipient to report on the use of funds in a manner described by the
45 commission.

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

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

5 (b) Nonprofit organizations and community colleges that partner with the local workforce
6 development board to develop and operate pilot programs described in subsection (3)(j) of this
7 section.

8 (6) No later than September 15, 2026, and every two years thereafter, the Higher Educa-
9 tion Coordinating Commission shall submit a report to the interim committees of the Leg-
10 islative Assembly relating to labor and business, in the manner provided in ORS 192.254, on
11 the outcomes of the Water Workforce Program, including information reported by a grant
12 recipient, and any recommendations for legislation.

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

14 SECTION 2. Not later than 90 days following the effective date of this 2025 Act, the
15 Higher Education Coordinating Commission shall distribute the funds specifically appropri-
16 ated to the commission under section 3 of this 2025 Act to local workforce development
17 boards for the purposes described under section 1 of this 2025 Act.

18 SECTION 3. In addition to and not in lieu of any other appropriation, there is appropri-
19 ated to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, for the biennium beginning July 1,
20 2025, out of the General Fund, the amount of \$5,500,000, to be distributed to local workforce
21 development boards for the purposes described under section 1 of this 2025 Act.

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

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