

Submitter: Nicolas Larco

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce
Development

Measure, Appointment or
Topic: HB3109

Members of the Oregon House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce
Development,

I am writing to express my strongest support for HB 3109, which would appropriate essential funding to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for distribution to the Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) at the University of Oregon. As one of the founders of this nationally recognized program, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the transformative impact it has on Oregon's communities, its students, and the future of sustainable city planning. This investment is not just a boost to higher education; it is a direct investment in Oregon's communities, workforce development, and long-term prosperity.

The Sustainable City Year Program has played a pivotal role in helping Oregon cities overcome barriers to progress, particularly in tackling complex challenges related to sustainability, infrastructure, planning, economic development, and climate adaptation. Through SCYP, university students are paired with real-world municipal challenges, bringing fresh insights, innovative problem-solving skills, and an infusion of research-backed energy into local government projects. Over the years, the program has helped cities design more walkable downtowns, improve transportation networks, reimagine public spaces, and assess climate resilience strategies—all efforts that would have been otherwise unattainable due to limited local resources.

One of the greatest strengths of SCYP is its ability to bridge the gap between academic learning and practical, hands-on experience. Students who participate in SCYP are not just engaging in hypothetical classroom exercises; they are working directly with city leaders, planning departments, and community stakeholders on projects that have real consequences. This kind of experiential learning is invaluable for their career development. Many SCYP alumni have gone on to work in city government, consulting firms, sustainability initiatives, and nonprofit organizations, taking with them the practical skills, professional networks, and confidence gained through their participation in the program.

Despite its undeniable success, one of the biggest obstacles SCYP faces is securing the necessary funding from cities to participate. Most cities across Oregon—particularly smaller and rural communities—simply do not have the financial resources to take advantage of this incredible program. They are eager for the expertise and energy that students bring but are unable to afford the modest cost-

sharing requirement needed to fund the university's coordination, faculty engagement, and project execution. By providing state funding for SCYP through HB 3109, we can remove this financial barrier and open the door for more communities to benefit from this exceptional partnership.

Funding SCYP means funding a future where Oregon's communities are stronger, more sustainable, and better prepared for the challenges ahead. It means investing in the education and career-readiness of our next generation of professionals. It means making sure that no Oregon city—regardless of size or budget—misses the opportunity to leverage the innovative thinking and technical skills of university students.

I urge you and your colleagues to support HB 3109 and ensure the continued success and expansion of this vital program. The return on investment is clear: stronger communities, better-trained students, and a more resilient Oregon. Please don't hesitate to reach out if I can provide further information or testimony in support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Nico Larco
Portland, Oregon

Submitting this testimony as a private citizen, but also hold the following positions:
Professor, University of Oregon
Co-Founder and Co-Director, Sustainable Cities Institute
Director, Urbanism Next Center
University of Oregon