

Southern OREGON UNIVERSITY

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

TESTIMONY OFFERED IN SUPPORT OF HB 2551

Delivered by Marc Overbeck, Director of Government Relations

Good morning Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair Fragala, Vice-Chair Harbick, and members of the committee. My name is Marc Overbeck, and I am here representing Southern Oregon University in support of HB 2551.

As you have heard, this bill was developed in response to an issue raised by a freelance reporter writing for *Street Roots* newspaper.

Southern Oregon University appreciates the work that Representative Hudson has done in recognizing background check transparency. HB 2551 is a thoughtful approach that ensures public universities and community colleges have full access to background information when making critical hiring decisions.

Our student body government, ASSOU, has made campus safety one of their key priorities this legislative session. We stand aligned with them in ensuring a safe environment for all. This bill supports transparent access in hiring decisions. It allows universities to be fully informed by all relevant background information that may bear on a candidate's suitability to hold the responsibility necessary for campus safety personnel at our public institutions of higher education.

We recognize and appreciate that HB 2551 does not seek to dictate specific employment decisions. From our many conversations with Chair Hudson, we are clear that the bill's intent is not to impose undue restrictions, but to ensure that higher education institutions have the information they need to make the best possible decisions regarding the safety of their communities.

At SOU, we value leadership, innovation and a positive culture that respects and supports all in the community. As such, we do believe in the power of redemption. People who have made mistakes in their past, but who have taken steps to make amends, deserve opportunities for a second chance. Last year, the Oregonian ran a series on the power of redemption, featuring a student at Southern Oregon University, who perpetrated and was convicted of a terrible crime. But this person served their time, made restitution, and has since successfully rejoined society as a productive member. This is a perfect example of how individuals can turn their lives around and contribute positively. By not *precluding* an employment decision for someone who has faced disciplinary action, HB 2551 ensures that background checks will help ensure safety, and help them to be an important tool for considering who we will entrust with the safety of our students, staff, and faculty.

Finally, we strongly support the -1 amendment that ensures the review of background check data is handled by the institution's Human Resources office, rather than requiring review by a college or university board. This change ensures that our boards are not asked to micromanage decisions that are appropriately in the hands of the office best equipped to handle such sensitive information.

In conclusion, Southern Oregon University fully supports HB 2551. We believe it strikes an important balance between ensuring campus safety and respecting the potential for personal growth and redemption. We appreciate the committee's consideration of this important legislation, and we urge your support.

Thank you for your time, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.