

Submitter: Tony Vezina

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB478

TO: Chair Senator Lew Frederick, D-Portland; Vice Chair Senator Suzanne Weber, R-Tillamook; Member Senator Sara Gelsler Blouin, D-Corvallis; Member Senator Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro; Member Senator Noah Robinson, R-Cave Junction

RE: Support for SB 478

FROM: Tony Vezina, Former Student Body President, Portland Community College

Dear Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

In 2016, as Student Body President of Portland Community College, I sat apart from the College's Trustees during regular board meetings, providing updates on student issues. This dynamic was both symbolic and telling. While both the student body and the Board of Directors shared a common goal—ensuring students received high-quality, affordable education leading to vibrant lives—our perspectives on how to achieve this differed greatly. The physical gap between my seat and the Board's may have been only three feet, but the gap in trust and understanding between students and the Board spanned miles.

I came to realize that the issue wasn't with the students, the Board of Directors, or even the college executives—it was rooted in governance and bureaucracy. After speaking with student leaders from other institutions, I learned that many colleges had student-voting trustees on their boards. Motivated by this insight, I initiated efforts to establish an ex officio student position on Portland Community College's Board of Directors.

Despite being met with skepticism—hearing remarks like "It will never happen" and "There isn't even time"—I understood that the resistance wasn't about the merit of the idea. Rather, it was a reluctance to challenge entrenched bureaucratic norms. Over the next nine months, I, and other student body members, navigated the complexities of the system, advocating tirelessly for student representation. Ultimately, our efforts culminated in the establishment of an ex officio student position during my final board meeting as president. I still keep the signed resolution in my office as a reminder that pragmatic solutions are possible when all critical stakeholders are involved.

I always hoped that this milestone would pave the way for a voting student trustee, and with SB 478, that day has arrived.

Having a student trustee will:

- Foster deeper understanding and collaboration between Board members, students, and college executives.
- Encourage institutions to innovate their programs and allocate financial resources more effectively.
- Educate students on the challenges colleges face in program development and budget management.
- Build a stronger sense of community and trust between students and their institutions.

I strongly urge you to support the student trustee provision in SB 478. It is a crucial step toward enhancing the governance, accountability, and effectiveness of our colleges.

Sincerely,  
Tony Vezina  
Former Student Body President  
Portland Community College