

TREASURE VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

February 11, 2025

Dear Senate Education Committee Members:

I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 478 that seeks to take away local control from community colleges and impose top-down mandates that will ultimately undermine the effectiveness of governance at the local level. I pose this question to the Senate Education Committee in all transparency, "What problem are we trying to solve?"

First, I would like to address the provision that mandates community colleges to pay board members up to \$500 in monthly stipends. While compensation for board members may seem like an incentive to encourage service, the decision of whether to provide stipends should remain within the discretion of local community colleges. Mandating stipends from a state level could add unnecessary financial strain and could lead to inequities across districts that are unable to support such a mandate. It also runs the risk of incentivizing individuals for the wrong reasons, potentially diminishing the focus on service and community engagement. Local control enables each district to make decisions that are best suited to their financial situation.

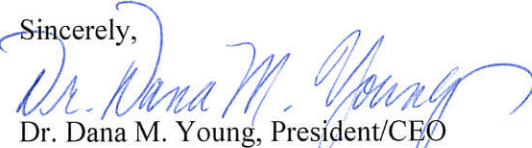
The second issue I wish to address is the provision requiring community colleges to allow a student to serve as a "voting" member on their board. While student involvement in the governance process is important, this bill would bypass the established, transparent process of electing representatives at the local level. Local boards have been successful in maintaining effective governance through elected representatives, and placing a student as a voting member without the requirement for the same election process undermines the core principles of accountability and representation. It is also important to note that students may not possess the same experience or understanding of the complex financial and policy issues that come with board decisions. As stakeholders in the system, students should be heard and valued, but this should not come at the expense of governance integrity or the legitimacy of decision-making bodies.

Finally, the provision granting boards the authority to approve all college memberships to organizations raises significant concerns. The decision to determine institutional memberships and affiliations should remain under the purview of the college leadership, not be dictated by state legislation. Community colleges have unique and diverse needs, and their memberships to various organizations are often tailored to address those specific needs. Local boards should not be responsible for making these decisions, as they are better suited to the expertise and priorities of the college leadership who are closest to the institution's mission and objectives.

In conclusion, while the intentions behind this bill may be to promote accountability and inclusivity, the reality is that it weakens local control and imposes rigid mandates that do not take into consideration the unique needs of individual community colleges. Our community colleges are successful precisely because they are responsive to their local contexts and empower their boards to make decisions based on the values and priorities of the communities they serve. Forcing these changes would create more bureaucracy, less local autonomy, and ultimately hinder the ability of community colleges to serve their students effectively.

I respectfully urge the Committee to reject this bill and allow local governance to continue thriving in the way that best serves the diverse needs of our community colleges and the students they educate. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,


Dr. Dana M. Young, President/CEO
Treasure Valley Community College