

Submitter: MARY FAITH BELL
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB478
Re: Testimony opposed to SB 478

Good afternoon, Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Mary Faith Bell. I am a Tillamook County Commissioner and the current chair of the Tillamook Bay Community College Board of Education, where I have served for over 10 years.

I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 478 in its current form, specifically regarding the proposed mandate to add a voting member to community college boards who does not go before the voters of the district.

I genuinely value student voices and every opportunity we get to learn from them and their experiences. I can safely speak for our entire board in saying that we all respect and encourage student involvement with our board. We go to considerable lengths to include students in our board process by inviting members of the student government to participate in our monthly meetings; inviting scholarship recipients to make presentations to the board; including students in our hiring committees for key leadership positions, and by serving as mentors to first generation scholars.

However, the proposal to add a voting board member who is not elected by the voters raises serious concerns. The principle of democratic governance is fundamental to our college's operations. Board members are elected by the communities they serve, and it is essential that only elected representatives hold voting power. Extending this to anyone who hasn't run in the same elections process would undermine this principle and set a troubling precedent, potentially leading to calls for similar changes in other elected boards across our state, from school districts to county commissions to city councils and beyond.

Students are eligible to run for applicable open board positions in our local elections. Many people in our community and on our board including me would warmly encourage a student who chose to run for the position.

Ultimately, we aim for board stability and longevity to responsibly serve our community and contribute to the governance of the college in meaningful ways. Community college students are transitory by nature of the programs offered. Ideally, they stay for two years, many for less, and some students stay part-time for longer. We see this in the turnover of student government positions. It is not reasonable to

expect that unelected student board members could commit to serve for full board terms, and experience indicates that it is unreasonable to expect students to show up monthly for one school year.

I urge you to reject Senate Bill 478 in its current form. While student representation is critical, the proposal for a voting student member on our board is neither necessary nor appropriate. I strongly encourage you to consider alternative means to further empower students and integrate their perspectives into our decision-making processes without undermining the democratic foundations that guide our governance.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your commitment to making thoughtful and well-informed decisions on behalf of Oregon's community colleges.

Mary Faith Bell
Tillamook Bay Community College Board of Education, chair