

SB 478 – Tillamook Bay Community College Elected Board Member

Good afternoon, Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Shannon Hoff, and I am a proud member of the Board of Education at Tillamook Bay Community College in Tillamook, Oregon. I have had the privilege of serving on the Board for 2 years, and I currently hold the position of board member.

I am here today 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. While I, like all of us, deeply value student voices and the vital perspectives they bring, I believe this bill fails to acknowledge and respect the electoral process that empowers community college board members to represent their districts. It also fails to acknowledge the existing structures that already ensure student input at the board level and on college governance councils.

At Tillamook Bay Community College, we have long prioritized student involvement and engagement. We provide meaningful opportunities for student voices to be heard at the Board level through non-voting student board members, regular student government reports, student forums and advisory committees. These efforts ensure that student perspectives are not only considered but integral to our decision-making process. In fact, our Board has benefitted greatly from the direct input of student representatives, and we have built a culture of collaboration that empowers students without compromising the democratic structure of our governance.

It is also important to note that students are not excluded from running for applicable open board positions in our local elections. In fact, students have successfully run for and held these positions, proving that students have both the opportunity and ability to participate in governance if they choose to do so.

However, the proposal to add a voting student member — who is not elected by the broader electorate of the college district — 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.

Additionally, introducing a voting student member would alter the structure of our boards, increasing the total number of voting members to eight. This change would create new

challenges in governance, particularly in situations where tie votes may arise. With an even number of members, the decision-making process could be further complicated, making it more difficult for the board to operate efficiently and effectively.

For these reasons, I urge you to reject Senate Bill 478 in its current form. While student representation is critical and must continue to be valued, 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.

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