

February 11, 2025

To: Senate Education Committee

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee:

For the record, I am **Neva Hutchinson** and I reside in Salem, Oregon. I proudly serve as a member of the Chemeketa Community College Board of Education (currently in my tenth year); and I am a former, eight-year member of the Salem-Keizer School District Board. I am submitting this written testimony to express my strong opposition to SB 478, a bill that undermines the democratic governing principles that guide our locally elected governing bodies.

I have always taken my role as an elected official seriously. As a K-12 school board member and a community college board trustee in our state for over 18 years combined, I know that the distinguishing feature of these roles is to be accountable to the voters of my district. Community college and K-12 school boards, like city councils, county commissions, and even this legislature, are elected bodies entrusted with making decisions on behalf of the communities they serve. SB 478 would impose a *voting* board member on these boards who does not go before the voters of the district like all other members of the elected board — something that is not required of *any other elected governing body* in Oregon. This fundamentally weakens the principle of representative democracy.

Like other locally elected governing bodies, community colleges have multiple ways to include constituents like students in the public policy process. That is certainly the case at Chemeketa. It is also important to realize that there is no prohibition on students running for these boards.

While student input is critical, granting a vote to a board member who does not answer to district voters is incompatible with the foundations of democratic governance. The Oregon Legislature does not seat unelected voting members. Neither do school boards, county commissions, or even water and soil districts. Community college boards should not be treated differently and to do so would set a concerning precedent to supersede the role of duly elected representatives.

SB 478 also presents practical governance challenges. With an eighth voting member, boards will face tie votes, making decision-making more difficult and potentially leading to gridlock. Furthermore, the bill mandates that boards vote on each statewide or national association the college joins — a level of legislative oversight imposed on no other local government or public higher education body. Community college boards already have the authority to set such policies if they choose; this mandate is unnecessary and overreaching.

For these reasons, I urge you to oppose SB 478 unless these critical issues are addressed through amendment. Thank you for your consideration.



Neva Hutchinson, Trustee, Chemeketa Community College Board of Education, Zone 3