

Submitter: Hannah Alzgal
Committee: Senate Education on Committee

Topic: SB 478

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

For the record, my name is Hannah Alzgal, and I am a former District Student Council Chair and Ex-Officio Student Trustee at Portland Community College.

I am writing in strong support of SB 478, especially the amendment that seeks to bridge the gap between Boards of Trustees and their student communities by including student representation on these boards.

It is important to recognize that today, the divide between Boards and students is wider than ever. Much like the civil rights struggles of the 70s and 80s, students are rightfully demanding greater transparency in how colleges manage their finances and make decisions. Including student representatives on Boards can begin to heal the disconnect many student groups feel from decision-makers. For years, students have felt their interests and the priorities of the Board have been misaligned. This change could foster trust between Trustees and students, transforming what has often been an antagonistic relationship into a collaborative one. It offers the opportunity to build civic leadership, create open channels for dialogue and negotiation, and provide transparency into decision-making processes—allowing students to see that their Board is truly fulfilling its role: making strategic, mission-driven decisions that shape the direction of the college. At present, many students do not feel this is happening, and I worry that excluding student representation will only further erode trust.

If there is concern about whether a student representative would fully understand policy-making and financial matters, you provide them with the same training given to new Board members—many of whom are elected with little or no prior understanding of college budgets. If the concern is about the difference between elected and appointed representatives, I ask that we apply an equity lens. The role of a student is different from that of someone with more time and resources to run for election, and that difference should be acknowledged.

During my time as Ex-Officio Student Trustee, I was trained on the college's budget and policy-making processes, and was encouraged to ask questions to better explain these issues to student groups. When disagreements arose between students and Trustees, I was able to bring empathy to both sides, fostering understanding and leading to constructive negotiations. It would be a missed opportunity not to engage in this kind of dialogue, as it can provide valuable insights that are in tune with students' needs and perspectives.

I urge the members of this committee to pass SB 478 and begin us on a path toward a more transparent, inclusive, and genuinely democratic system—one that could have far-reaching cultural and political effects.

