



## **The Oregon Community College Association Opposes SB 478**

Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the committee, for the record, my name is John Wykoff, and I'm the Deputy Director of the Oregon Community College Association. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding SB 478.

Like you, we value and support strong student engagement in community college governance. However, we must respectfully oppose SB 478 in its current form. Unfortunately, community colleges were not consulted in the drafting of this bill, and we were not made aware of its provisions until it was introduced. Moreover, we were not made aware of the -1 amendment to SB 478 until a member of the public submitted testimony yesterday supporting it before it had been released on OLIS.

Additionally, certain provisions of the bill raise concerns regarding local governance and democratic representation. Community college boards of education are locally elected governing bodies, just like school boards, city councils, county commissions, and even the state legislature. These boards are directly accountable to the voters in their districts, who entrust them to make decisions in the best interest of their communities. No other elected governing body in Oregon is subject to a legislative mandate requiring an additional voting board member who is not accountable to district voters. This bill would create such a mandate, setting a concerning precedent that does not fully respect the electoral process that empowers local board members to represent their communities.

Importantly, student voices are already well-represented in community college governance. Every college in Oregon has structured ways to ensure student input, including ex-officio student board positions, regular student government association reports, and other institutionalized forms of engagement. There is also no prohibition on students running for and winning a seat on their community college board. In fact, we have seen students successfully do so. Student participation in governance is essential, but granting voting authority to a board member who has not been elected by district voters is inconsistent with democratic principles.

In Oregon, only elected representatives vote in the legislature, on school boards, on county commissions, and even on water and soil districts. Community colleges should be no different. Beyond these concerns, SB 478 would also alter the composition of community college boards, expanding them to eight members and increasing the likelihood of tie votes, which could make governance more difficult.

Additionally, the bill requires community college boards to vote on each statewide or national association their college joins. However, boards already have the authority to establish such policies, and no other local government entity or public higher education board in Oregon is subject to a similar legislative mandate.



OCCA does not oppose the provisions of the bill that would provide board members with college email addresses, publicly post their contact information, or permit colleges to offer a \$500 monthly stipend or reimbursement. These sections are permissive, meaning local boards may choose whether to adopt them, and we support that local flexibility.

In summary, we respectfully urge the committee to oppose SB 478. We are open to conversations about strengthening student participation in governance, but we believe it must be done in a way that respects the principles of elected representation and preserves effective governance structures.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.