

Date: February 12th, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Nick Keough, Political and Legislative Organizer, AFT-Oregon

Re: Support for SB 478

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

Today, AFT-Oregon is writing to express our **enthusiastic support of SB 478, which strengthens shared governance, accountability, and transparency within Oregon's Community College Boards of Education.** As a labor federation representing faculty, classified staff, and graduate employees across Oregon's public higher education institutions, we know that the success of our colleges depends on governance structures that are inclusive, democratic, and responsive to the needs of students and workers alike.

Community colleges serve a diverse population, including first-generation students, working parents, and individuals seeking career transitions. These institutions are most effective when decision-making reflects the lived experiences of those they serve. **SB 478 makes meaningful reforms to enhance Board of Education accountability and ensure student representation in governance.**

Students bring a unique and necessary perspective on issues such as tuition, financial aid, campus services, and academic policies. Their direct involvement helps Boards make more informed, student-centered decisions. Beyond student representation, SB 478 includes other necessary reforms to increase Board accountability and accessibility, such as:

- **Publicly Available Email Addresses:** Ensuring that Board of Education members have official, publicly posted email addresses enhances communication and transparency. Faculty, staff, students, and the public must be able to easily contact decision-makers and engage in governance processes.
- **Stipends for Board Members:** Allowing boards to provide voting members with a stipend of up to \$500 per month removes financial barriers to participation. Board service should be accessible to individuals from all backgrounds, including working-class community members who may otherwise be unable to serve.
- **Democratic Oversight of Institutional Memberships:** Requiring a Board vote before

a community college joins a state or national association increases transparency and ensures that institutional affiliations align with the values and priorities of the campus community.

In closing, shared governance and board accountability at the community college level are critical to ensuring that institutions fulfill their mission of providing **high-quality, affordable, and accessible education**. Oregon's public universities already include student representation on their governing boards – it is time to bring our community colleges to the same standard by ensuring students have a meaningful voice in decisions that impact their education and future.

We urge you to support SB 478. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Signed,

AFT-Oregon

<https://www.aft-oregon.org/about-aft-oregon>