

**Date:** February 12th, 2025

**To:** Senate Committee on Education

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

**Re:** Support for SB 478 - Oral Testimony

**Vice Chair Weber and Members of the Committee,**

My name is Nick Keough, and I am a political and legislative organizer with the American Federation of Teachers - Oregon. I am here today to speak in support of SB 478, which will improve student representation, transparency, and accountability in community college governance.

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.

SB 478 requires that the student representative be elected or selected through student governance processes. This means that while they may not be elected by district-wide voters, they are still chosen democratically by the people most directly affected by board decisions – students. Students are the primary stakeholders in community colleges – they pay tuition, rely on campus services, and directly experience the effects of board decisions. Their lived experience is critical to shaping policies that actually work.

As a former Student Body President at LCC, I attended Board of Education meetings, advocating for students on issues that impact them the most. Time and time again, I saw how critical decisions were made without a student voice at the table. While student leaders were sometimes allowed to provide testimony or updates, we were not part of the actual decision-making process. The lack of formal student representation on the Board meant that the student perspective was often overlooked, despite the fact that those decisions directly impacted our education.

I also bring a broader perspective to this conversation from my work on Senator Dembrow's public university governance workgroup. In that process, we worked to improve transparency and accountability at Oregon's public universities,

including adding additional voting seats for students on university boards and requiring that board members have publicly available institutional email addresses to improve communication and accessibility.

The reforms outlined in SB 478 align directly with the standards we set for public universities just a few years ago. Students at community colleges deserve the same level of representation, access, and transparency that their university counterparts now have. There is no justification for maintaining a two-tiered system of governance where university students have a voice, but community college students do not.

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. Please support SB 478.