

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I serve as an elected member of the Oregon City School Board, but, today I am speaking to you as a concerned community member. My own child is a current student at Clackamas Community College, and another has recently graduated. I am writing to you because I care deeply about protecting the integrity of our local governing bodies and ensuring that voices are heard in a fair and representative way.

SB 478 would fundamentally change the way our community college boards operate by allowing a student, who has been appointed or elected in a manner outside the election process, to have the same voting power as those who were chosen by the people. That is not how democracy works. Every board member—whether on a school board or in the Oregon Legislature—should be accountable to the voters and community that they serve.

I want to be clear: student voices matter. Elected officials representing students must find ways to listen to them, advocate for their needs, and ensure that they are heard in meaningful ways. One way would be to make sure that Board members' emails are easily accessible as described in this bill. However, no single student can fully represent the rich diversity of experiences, challenges, and perspectives within a student body. That is why I appreciate that Clackamas Community College already has strong systems in place—surveys, focus groups, and elected student government positions—so that all students have an opportunity to make their voices count.

Students are not excluded from leadership. If they want a seat at the table, they can run, campaign, and be elected. I also want to share that the stipends proposed as part of this legislation may attract a more diverse group of candidates as sitting on a board is very time consuming and there can be significant costs around child care, food and transportation which are all barriers for students or others to have the ability to run and be elected. But allowing an individual selected, rather than duly elected, to have the same authority as those chosen by the people undermines the very foundation of representative democracy. The Oregon Legislature does not appoint unelected voting members, nor do school boards. Community college boards should be no different.

Thank you,

Heidi Blackwell, EdD
Oregon City School District School Board Member