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February 17, 2025

House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
900 Court Street NE, HR C
Salem, OR 97301

RE: House Bill 2747

Chair Hudson, Vice Chairs Fragala and Harbick, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Deborah Arthur, and I am the founder of Portland State University's Higher Education in Prison Program (HEP). Our program offers a bachelor's degree pathway inside Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, and a certificate program at Oregon State Penitentiary. PSU was also the only four-year school in the state and one of the few in the country to be approved as an eligible "Prison Education Program," allowing our incarcerated students to access federal Pell grants.

I write in support of HB 2747 which requires the Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide adults in custody at all department institution access to specific online education programs.

We must do all we can to promote equitable access to post-secondary education for incarcerated students across DOC facilities. The infrastructure within Oregon's prisons will need to meet the expected demand for access to and successful participation in higher education. Technology access is key to this goal. The delivery of postsecondary education and training has been changing for years as technology allows for greater remote interaction with students through online platforms for teaching and learning. Many of our incarcerated students are currently being left behind in this regard and classroom space in the facilities is very limited.

Through Senate Bill 1522 in 2022, Coffee Creek became one of two DOC facilities to have access to some technology for learning purposes for students. Separate instances of our Learning Management System (Canvas) were allowed-listed, giving students access to relevant course materials. The DOC IT team worked closely and diligently with PSU IT staff to make the right adjustments and decisions to protect students, faculty, staff, and the public.

We recognize that technology comes with risk, but risk can be successfully monitored, mitigated and managed. While advances in technology require resources, the costs of not providing educational technology access to incarcerated students are much higher, including increased unemployment rates, lower wages, and continued intergenerational poverty.

We know that education transforms the lives of our students and helps prepare them for successful reentry back into our communities, thus saving public safety dollars. I urge you to support House Bill 2747 to ensure that post-secondary students in custody at all DOC facilities have online access to educational opportunities.

Sincerely,

Deborah Smith Arthur, M.A., J.D.
Associate Executive Director; Professor
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