

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

For the record, my name is Dr. Joe Morelock, and I serve as the superintendent of Willamette ESD. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I am here today because Oregon faces a growing crisis—one that threatens our economy, our communities, and the opportunities available to our students. Oregon has a severe shortage of skilled workers, and the need continues to grow. This year alone, the healthcare sector requires 27,000 additional skilled professionals just to meet current demand. By 2029, our state will see an average of 52,000 new job openings annually that require technical expertise. The need is undeniable, and the pipeline to fill those jobs is at a trickle.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is one of the most powerful tools we have to address this crisis. Yet, Oregon lags behind in its investment. While Measure 98 provided some support, it is not a dedicated, sustainable funding source for CTE. In fact, while 36% of Measure 98 funds are reaching CTE programs, when we compare Oregon's investment to our neighbors—Washington State funds CTE at nearly 10 times the level that we do—we are simply falling behind. Access is also deeply inequitable. A student in a large district may have access to 50 different CTE programs, while a student in a rural community may have only three.

This is where **Regional Career Centers (RCCs)** come in. Oregon already has a law—ORS 344.125—that mandates regional career centers at the K-12 level, but it has never been meaningfully funded. RCCs offer a cost-effective, community-driven solution. By leveraging Oregon's 19 ESDs as regional hubs, we can efficiently provide high-quality, career-connected learning to students statewide, develop the critical coordination between programs across the state to ensure quality and accountability, and open the doors to world-class workforce development opportunities regardless of zip code.

To make this vision a reality, we need **legislative action and investment**. School districts and ESDs simply do not have the resources to build or expand these centers alone. State funding is essential for developing new facilities, repurposing existing spaces, and equipping students with the hands-on training necessary for success. RCC funding would support mobile labs, skilled instructors, work-based learning partnerships, and collaboration with community colleges to offer dual credit opportunities.

HB 3552 does three things:

- it provides matching funds for the construction or remodel of facilities in the population areas of the state where that model makes sense;
- It provides funding for the staffing of workforce development programs, in both Regional Career Centers as well as shared staffing in more rural areas where those teachers may need to travel to various districts and communities;
- And it provides funding for regional hubs, which are tasked with the development of programs, the licensure and training of teaching and support staff, and the coordination among local school districts, Oregon's community colleges, and regional workforce and talent development boards.

This is not an education issue. This is an economic issue. A workforce issue. A healthcare issue. This is about Oregon's economic health and development and its place in the future; where young people can live and work and provide critical services in the communities in which they grew up. During today's testimonies, you will hear from both educators and industry leaders, in healthcare and others, who will tell you that they are ready to partner, ready to hire, and ready to invest in students and in our future together—if we can provide them with students and future workers who possess the skills they need.

Oregon's future depends on the choices we make today. Let's make the right choice. Let's invest in Regional Career Centers and give our students the opportunities they deserve and Oregon the future it demands.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I would welcome any questions you may have.