



American Association of University Professors

Academic Freedom for a Free Society

February 25, 2025

House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

Re: House Bill HB 3213 – Support

Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Fragala and Harbick, and members of the committee:

For the record my name is Elizabeth McMurtry, and I have been an AP, (academic professional) in the faculty support office of PSU for the past 2.5 years. I proudly serve as Vice President for Legislative & Political Action for my union, PSU AAUP, and I am a member of AAUP Oregon's Legislative Committee.

On behalf of the more than 6,300 members of the American Association of University Professors in Oregon, our collective bargaining chapters at the University of Oregon, Portland State University, Oregon State University, and Oregon Institute of Technology, and our faculty members in advocacy chapters across Oregon, we urge you to support HB 3213.

The students, staff, and faculty at Oregon's public universities are struggling due to decisions made by public university administrators and Oregon's legislature. Tuition rises year after year, academic workforce wages consistently fail to keep up with inflation, and academic programs and services for students are weakened by workforce cuts and the loss of dedicated faculty and staff to better paying opportunities. At PSU, we are currently facing the loss of 17 faculty members due to austerity measures, and a massive overburdening of our academic staff members who provide invaluable services like financial aid counseling, academic advising, transfer advising, and more. Losses like these only serve to worsen student outcomes, and weaken our invaluable public institutions.

Given the depths of this avoidable crisis, students, staff, faculty, and Oregon's taxpayers deserve to have a clearer picture of the financial condition of our public universities. HB 3213 would help to achieve this by expanding Oregon's public records laws to apply to public university foundations. Currently, there is no consistency across institutional foundations as to what information the public can access, and there is no

transparency about how funds raised by these foundations are intended to be used. Collectively, Oregon's public universities hold approximately \$3.5 billion in university endowments, and 92.5% of these funds are restricted by secret, donor-imposed conditions, many of which are structured to prevent dollars from being spent in ways that could benefit the university community, such as reducing student's tuition burden or ensuring the academic workforce serving our students receive fair wages.

Foundation transparency is not a new or radical concept. Twenty-two other states, including every state that touches our borders, have passed similar legislation without undermining the fundraising potential of the university foundations. There is no reason to believe that the case will be any different here in Oregon. In fact, this law is written to protect the generous donors who choose to financially support the mission of the university by expanding common-sense carve-outs to protect donor names, addresses, and other identifiable information. Combined with the strong protections already found in Oregon's existing public records laws, this law will create transparency without sacrificing security or competitiveness.

As the chaos in Washington DC continues to undermine our public universities, some of our public university administrators may be willing to sacrifice the academic freedom of our faculty and our students' freedom to learn by accepting donor funds from wealthy ideologues. Such decisions would only further weaken Oregon's public universities by drastically altering their mission. Passing HB 3213 would help to prevent such partisan meddling. At such a critical period in the history of our state and our nation, the university community and the Oregon taxpayers deserve to know what strings are attached to the gifts accepted by our public university foundations to protect the interests of all Oregonians.

Please support HB 3213. Thank you for your consideration.

Elizabeth McMurtry
Vice President for Legislative & Political Action, PSU AAUP
Member of the Legislative Committee, AAUP Oregon