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Testimony in Opposition to HB 3213

Penny Atkins, OSU Class of 1979, Chair of the OSU Foundation Board of Trustees

Chair Hudson, Vice Chairs Fragala and Harbick, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am Penny Atkins, and I graduated from the Oregon State University College of Business in 1979. I divide my time between Oregon and Idaho. Today, I am here in my capacity as the Chair of the Oregon State University Foundation Board of Trustees, which is a legally separate non-profit that supports our public university.

I also speak today as someone who cares deeply about the success of our students. I was a first-generation student and access to higher education changed my life in profound ways. I am deeply committed to paying it forward, not only with my financial gifts to support scholarships at OSU but also through my volunteer service to the university.

Speaking as a donor, I have deep concerns that this bill would make the details of my gifts to OSU public information. In this increasingly politicized environment, donors are more concerned than ever about maintaining privacy around personal financial information and charitable gifts.

I believe donors like myself want the personal choice to identify the programs and initiatives they want to support. HB3213 takes away from that privacy and trust. As a result, the bill does nothing to increase giving to our public universities. If the State of Oregon continues to limit higher ed funding, we cannot afford to risk deterring donors from supporting our students. There is nothing to be gained and a lot to be lost.

Last year, over 16,800 alumni and friends made gifts to OSU, and over 4,000 gave their time and expertise as volunteers. This support is essential to our students' success. Unfortunately, the state of Oregon has consistently deprioritized funding for higher education. Nothing in this bill will change that. Oregon ranks near the bottom nationally in state funding for higher ed. This has shifted the burden to students and their families. The OSU Foundation has played a crucial role in raising funds to supplement what the state provides, though, of course, it cannot fully replace it.

Barriers like HB 3213 divert attention away from the real priority at hand: ensuring that today's students have access to the educational experiences that will lead to fulfilling and productive lives.

I respectfully ask you to please consider the broader implications of this bill and its impact on Oregon's students. Thank you for your time and for your dedication to higher education in our state.