



Testimony on HB 2715

House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee

March 6, 2025

Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Fragala and Harbick, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas, and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2715.

In 2021, the Legislative Assembly provided regional public universities with the ability to offer professional doctoral degrees, subject to HECC approval. Since that privilege was granted to these institutions, Western Oregon University has received approval for two programs, one in physical therapy and the other in occupational therapy.

The bill before you today provides those institutions and the Oregon Institution of Technology with the ability to offer up to five research doctoral degrees (Ph.Ds. and other similar degree designations) per institution. HECC review and approval of degree programs is intended to ensure that programs offered are consistent with institutional mission, are aligned with state, institutional, and student interests, and are not unnecessarily duplicative with other programs. With public resources involved, both operational and capital, it is HECC review that applies a statewide lens to the creation of new academic programming.

HECC does not review programs on their academic merits. HECC also does not determine whether a program proposal makes sense, financial or academic, for an individual institution to offer. This represents the division that exists in Oregon's higher education system, with individual institutional governing boards granted the primary responsibility to determine the sensibility and the feasibility of their own program offerings.

At present, HECC does not have information on the demand at the institutional level to offer such programs, but would consider each proposal individually according to the principles described in this testimony.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.