



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Written Testimony of Hank Childs

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Before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

In Support of House Bill 5024

March 17, 2025

Co-Chair Woods, Co-Chair Gomberg, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development,

My name is Hank Childs, and I serve as the Interim Executive Director for the School of Computer and Data Sciences (SCDS) at the University of Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of House Bill 5024 and the continued funding for Business Oregon, whose investment in the Oregon UAS Accelerator has been instrumental in driving innovation and workforce development.

One of my major goals as Executive Director is to increase experiential learning opportunities for our students, with experiential learning meaning internships, research, capstone projects, hackathons, etc. The Oregon UAS Accelerator has been a tremendous partner to us. Internships have become more scarce in the last year, but the Oregon UAS Accelerator is a very notable exception, with five University of Oregon students heading to internships with startup founders. Through the University of Oregon's partnership with the accelerator, our students gain hands-on experience working alongside entrepreneurs and industry leaders, applying their technical skills to real-world challenges in automation and robotics. These internships and learning opportunities bridge the gap between academia and industry, ensuring that Oregon's next generation of engineers, data scientists, and innovators are well-prepared to enter the workforce. Further, the Oregon UAS Accelerator has agreed to visit our campus twice in the year ahead. The first visit will be in May, during which they will participate in our "internship seminar." This course is about much more than internships, as it gives our students insights into careers and employers, and how to prepare to engage with them. The second visit, in the fall, will support our entrepreneurial activities (discussed later in this letter).

Another key goal as Executive Director is to identify "stars in our region" and forge partnerships with them. With these partners, we will identify shared research goals, adapt our program to better serve their workforce needs, and partner on experiential learning opportunities. **I have concluded that Joseph Wyno and his team are indeed stars in our region,** and we plan to deepen our relationship with



them in the years ahead. I already mentioned experiential learning via internships, but our partnership with them goes beyond this. Next year, SCDS will introduce new activities focused on entrepreneurship. We will have thought leaders come offer “reverse pitches” to our students throughout the fall, identifying potential directions for startups. We will then have our students pursue some of these directions, first via a Hackathon, and subsequently in a capstone-style course that focuses on entrepreneurship. Joseph has committed to having himself or a delegate come to our campus in Fall to participate in these reverse pitches. Further, if students pursue projects in this space, Oregon UAS Accelerator personnel are willing to meet with students as they pursue their capstone-style projects. My conversations with Joseph have directly inspired this initiative. Learning about his activities and openness to partnership have been the catalyst we needed to launch complementary activities within SCDS. Beyond experiential learning, I aim for SCDS to pursue research partnerships with the Oregon UAS Accelerator. I have already discussed with Joseph what expertise our School should have to better prepare students for the UAS field. My hope is that we can either recruit faculty or direct our existing faculty so we can jointly pursue research.

As described in this letter, I feel our School has made a tremendous partner in the Oregon UAS Accelerator. We are thrilled to work with them and further our goals together. I am sure you will find that the Oregon UAS Accelerator provides essential resources, mentorship, and financial support to small business startup founders who are pioneering advancements in autonomous aerial and robotic systems. However, with this letter, I want to convey that the accelerator’s impact extends well beyond these startups—it is a vital workforce development engine, creating high-value internship and career pathways for students eager to contribute to Oregon’s growing high-tech economy.

Without continued funding that House Bill 5024 provides, these critical programs would be at risk. Business Oregon’s investment in the accelerator is not just about supporting startups—it is about fostering an ecosystem where students, businesses, and industry leaders can collaborate to drive Oregon’s economic future. Continued support for Business Oregon ensures that this pipeline of talent and innovation remains strong, benefiting not only the entrepreneurs in the program but also the companies and institutions that rely on a skilled, future-ready workforce.

The University of Oregon values its partnership with the Oregon UAS Accelerator and strongly supports House Bill 5024 to sustain the essential funding that makes these opportunities possible. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to advancing Oregon’s leadership in technology, workforce development, and economic growth.

Respectfully submitted,

Hank Childs

Interim Executive Director

School of Computer and Data Sciences, University of Oregon