



April 4, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Senator Lieber, Representative Sanchez, and Committee Members:

*Campus may be an everyday word for young adults on the academic track. On the workforce pathway, however, it is rare. With State support this session, for Central Oregon that is about to change.*

Heart of Oregon Corps trains tomorrow's workforce today and invests in youth's well-being and community-connectedness. As the Oregon Legislature focuses on addressing Oregon's greatest challenges: housing affordability, the childcare shortage, and wildfire risk, Heart of Oregon Corps is uniquely positioned to respond by preparing youth for employment in the conservation, construction, and early childhood education fields.

Operating for 25 years, HOC focuses on engaging 16-24-year-old "Opportunity Youth" who are disconnected from school and work, in addition to minority, rural, and other youth experiencing barriers such as low income, foster care, court-involvement, and housing instability. Our programs provide training and workforce readiness in three areas—conservation, construction, and early childhood education. Participants earn wages or stipends, scholarships, workforce certifications, diplomas/GEDs, and in one program, even Oregon BOLI pre-apprenticeship certification.

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony in support of the "Heart of Oregon Corps" capital project under consideration. This project will create a vibrant centralized campus in Redmond, Oregon. The 3.4-acre campus includes an existing manufacturing building and covered bays, and the construction of a new 6,600 square-foot youth-focused campus center building. HOC's unique needs for classroom and industrial training spaces, comprehensive parking and equipment infrastructure, and vibrant community spaces are met at this site.

In 2022, HOC was fortunate to be awarded a \$2M capital project grant from the Oregon State Legislature. Additional funding has since been secured at the city, county, and community levels, more than doubling the state's initial investment. As HOC moves forward, additional funding is crucial to support the project for four key reasons. (1) This project responds directly to Oregon's most pressing challenges, including housing affordability, wildfire risk, childcare shortage, and youth workforce development, aligning with the state's urgent priorities. (2) The decision to purchase the land instead of leasing requires a larger initial investment, but ensures long-term sustainability and strengthens the project's future. (3) Unanticipated inflation has driven construction costs beyond initial estimates, necessitating additional resources. (4) Securing additional funding will enable us to deliver youth workforce training to Central Oregon without delay.

A \$1M award from the State Legislature would help close the current funding gap in our \$7.3M project budget and ensure that we are able to stay on track to begin construction in 2025, with completion in 2026. This would allow HOC to more quickly enhance youth workforce development services throughout Central Oregon and would prevent costly fundraising delays in the construction timeline.

The organizations listed below enthusiastically endorse our vision for a centralized campus and recognize its profound impact on youth workforce development in Central Oregon. Please see the compelling letters of support they submitted with our comprehensive application. This project boasts robust backing from the community.



Thank you for your consideration of our request. Comprehensive youth-centered workforce training is more critical than ever. Heart of Oregon's new central campus directly responds to this pressing need. Moreover, this campus concept comes at a perfect time to provide a dramatic inflection point in stemming the decline in young adult workforce interest and engagement, and carries the potential to be a model for other organizations enjoined in this mission field.

Sincerely,

Kara D Johnson  
Deputy Director