

April 21, 2025

Senator Janeen Sollman
Representative Ricki Ruiz
Co-Chairs of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 5525

Dear Senator Sollman, Representative Ruiz, and members of the Subcommittee on Education,

I am writing to express my support for SB 5525, which would appropriate money from the General Fund to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for funding the second biennium of the Oregon Cybersecurity Center of Excellence (OCCoE). As the Executive Director for the Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO), I was appointed by Governor Kotek to serve on the Advisory Council for the Oregon Cybersecurity Center of Excellence. I also serve as Chair of the OCCoE Advisory Council.

SDAO represents approximately 965 Oregon special districts that provide critical infrastructure and public services such as drinking water, sanitation, fire protection, emergency medical services, ports, parks, transportation, hospitals, irrigation, and electricity. There are 36 different types of Oregon special districts that reach every community and residence in the state.

Cybersecurity threats are becoming increasingly sophisticated and pervasive, posing significant risks to the essential services provided by our special districts. These entities often operate with limited resources and may lack the specialized expertise required to effectively defend against cyberattacks. Of the nearly 1,000 Oregon special districts, nearly 400 operate entirely with volunteers. Of the districts with paid staff, we estimate only 5% have full-time information technology staff. The OCCoE serves as a centralized resource, offering much-needed support, training, and guidance to bolster the cybersecurity defenses of these vital public service organizations.

The benefits of the OCCoE to Oregon's special districts are manifold:

1. **Enhanced Security Posture:** By providing access to cutting-edge cybersecurity tools, best practices, and threat intelligence, the OCCoE will help special districts proactively identify and mitigate potential cyber threats.

2. **Training and Education:** The OCCoE will offer specialized training programs tailored to the unique needs of special districts, ensuring that staff are well-equipped to handle cybersecurity challenges and respond effectively to incidents.
3. **Collaboration and Information Sharing:** The OCCoE will facilitate collaboration and information sharing among special districts and other local governments, fostering a community of practice that can collectively address common cybersecurity issues and share solutions.
4. **Incident Response Support:** In the event of a cyber incident, the OCCoE will provide expert guidance and support to help special districts quickly recover and minimize the impact on their operations and the communities they serve.
5. **Cost Efficiency:** By centralizing resources and expertise, the OCCoE will enable special districts to access high-quality cybersecurity services at a fraction of the cost of developing these capabilities independently.
6. **Workforce Development:** The OCCoE's mission to expand workforce development through the university system has the multiplied impact of increasing a crucial supply of cybersecurity professionals while deploying students in the program to assist Oregon's local governments with their cybersecurity consulting needs.

The OCCoE's mission is large and important. Special districts and other Oregon local governments desperately need assistance to take on the monumental challenge of hardening their cybersecurity. The OCCoE can't effectively take on this challenge without financial support. SB 5525 allocates \$11.3 million to the OCCoE to dedicate staff, train our workforce, and provide direct services to Oregon's local governments. It's a mission that is critical to protecting the ability of local governments to continue providing essential public services, and we urge your support.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Stratton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Frank Stratton
Executive Director