

Joint Committee on Transportation Testimony: Dr. G. David Beasley

Co-Chair Gorsek and Co-Chair McLain, for the record my name is Dr. David Beasley, and I am the Director of Development, Annual Giving, and Sponsorships at the Western Oregon University Foundation. I am also an adjunct instructor in the Literature Department at Western, and prior to my work at the WOU Foundation, I was an Advisor to Education students. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today on behalf of Western Oregon University and in favor of Senate Bill 1022.

My experiences at Western over the last several years have demonstrated to me just how much the university means not only to the students, faculty, staff, and alumni but to the region and the state as a whole. The overwhelming majority – 84% – of our students as of Fall 2024 enrollment are from Oregon, and we have over 27,000 reachable alumni living across the state with the vast majority within a 60 mile radius of campus. In addition, Western has a devoted fan base for its 14 NCAA Division II Athletic programs, and with an average of 1,500 individuals donating to various funds at Western each year, we are confident that we have the support to meet the proposed minimums of 500 initial sales and 300 each year thereafter required to justify the production and continuation of these license plates.

When we first looked at launching a WOU license plate, the requirements of 3,000 initial sales and 2,000 sales per year were quite simply too high for us to be able to confidently move forward as those thresholds exceeded our current level of annual contributors. However, a lower threshold makes this much more feasible for us without impacting those who are currently donating. We have been taking steps behind the scenes to improve our ability to connect with our in-state alumni and friends of the university. As part of this work, we have been holding regional alumni events, increasing our marketing presence across the state, and gathering updated contact information. These efforts have already borne fruit for us, and we have seen a significant increase in our reach through various marketing channels.

Western alumni, fans of Wolves Athletics, and friends of the university should have the same opportunity to show their support for their school, regardless of our size. The same is true for the alumni, fans, and friends of our other regional institutions. We might not be as big as UO or OSU, but we play a critical role in the communities we serve. We are excited at the prospect of Wolves across the state showing their school spirit on their license plates. In addition, we believe that the opportunity to have a Western license plate will increase our reach with our alumni and will enable more people to engage with the university.

More than the chance to show school spirit, the university's part of the proceeds from the license plate sales will go directly to the Student Success Scholarship Fund. This is a current-use fund that provides average awards of \$1,000 for nearly 130 students across the university, so all dollars raised through the sale of these license plates will go directly to students. License plate funds will help us be able to both increase the number of students served and the average award amount. Scholarship dollars are especially important at Western,

where half of our students are the first in their family to attend college, and over 40% qualify for Pell grants.

We acknowledge and embrace the fact that we are not a large school, and we were never intended to be; however, we are the oldest public university in the state and a landmark in the mid-Willamette Valley. We have fervent support from the community and our alumni alike. Regional institutions play a critical role in educating the next generation who often stick close to home and provide social mobility for their families. Regional universities like Western are essential economic drivers in the regions they serve, and Western is no exception. Western alumni, and those from the other regional universities, deserve the chance to show their school spirit on their license plates as well.

Let me close by reiterating that Oregon's regional universities play an important role across the state. Approving this lower threshold will demonstrate continuing commitment to the collective mission and purpose of the regionals and allow alumni from the regionals to demonstrate their school pride and support future students by purchasing a plate. The lower threshold will provide an equitable opportunity for a similar marketing reach as the larger state schools and will provide crucial scholarship support for current and future students.

Once again, I urge you to support Senate Bill 1022 and to display your belief in Western Oregon University, Eastern Oregon University, Southern Oregon University, and the Oregon Institute of Technology. Thank you again for your time and this opportunity.