

Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Education
Oregon State Legislature

Re: Support for SB 5525 – Oregon Community College Funding

Dear Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz and Members of Committee,

I am writing to urge your support for funding the Community College Support Fund at \$920 million for the 2025-27 biennium. As someone who has worked in the Oregon Community College system for more than 27 years, I have witnessed countless students' lives transformed by the opportunities provided by our community colleges. Community colleges are Oregon's most affordable entry point to post-secondary education and career training, and they play an essential role in workforce and economic development across the state.

In recent years, community college enrollment has been increasing statewide, with FTE enrollment up 7.5 percent over the last academic year. This growth is most pronounced in Career and Technical Education (CTE) degrees and related short-term career certificates. These programs are vital as they offer students pathways to family wage careers and help local communities address critical workforce needs.

However, CTE programs are also the most expensive programs community colleges offer. For example, nursing programs require significant investment in equipment to ensure relevant and effective hands-on training. To maintain these and other crucial education and training programs, community colleges need an additional \$120 million for the 2025-27 biennium – a 15.7 percent increase over the 2023-2025 biennium.

Oregon community colleges ensure open access for all, regardless of education, economic status, or age. The average community college student is 26 years old, with 52% over 25. Demand for services like childcare, food, and housing assistance has surged in the past five years, with high rates of food and housing insecurity. Mt. Hood Community College has made significant investments in student basic needs, a food pantry, and affordable housing, but demand still exceeds available resources. These services are critical to student success, as they help ensure that students can focus on their education without the distraction of unmet basic needs. Community colleges are the most affordable option for students, whether they are transferring to a four-year university or seeking career and technical education and training.

Your support for the Community College Support Fund at \$920 million will ensure community colleges can continue to serve their students and communities effectively.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jennifer DeMent, Vice President, Finance & Administration, Mt. Hood Community College