

Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Howard and I am the President of Chemeketa Community College, which serves Marion, Polk, Yamhill, and a portion of Linn counties, and is based right here in Salem. I am writing today to voice my strong support for Oregon's community colleges and to urge you to fully fund the Community College Support Fund at \$920 million.

In terms of student enrollment, Chemeketa is the second-largest community college in our state, serving between 17 and 18,000 individuals each year.

Community colleges, regardless of size, have a wide-ranging mission to transform lives and strengthen communities through quality education, services, and workforce training. This can and does take innumerable forms, and you have heard all about this during our three days of presentation and testimony with the Oregon Community College Association.

For the larger community college in Oregon, this already-broad scope typically results in even greater variety in transfer and technical programming, more facilities, increased extracurricular and community activities, and extended scheduling when compared to small institutions. The communities we serve are larger and often more diverse, meaning that we need to address a kaleidoscope of student needs and external expectations, and that we engage with a multiplicity of potential partners to do so – more community-based organizations, agencies, businesses, industries, feeder schools and school districts, local universities, and multiple cities, neighborhoods, and governments. The size and complexity of a community is mirrored by the college trying to serve it, and while there is much opportunity, we are limited by what we can afford to provide. In addition, we must be embedded throughout our service district in order to ensure adequate access to our learning environments and community resources, and this carries significant infrastructure costs.

All of Oregon's community colleges are critical for the well-being of their stakeholders and economies, but large colleges have a disproportionate impact on how Oregon performs as a whole – its ability to grow workforce sectors, provide multiple pathways out of poverty, and spur economic development. Portland Community College, the state's largest, combined with Chemeketa, serves 35% of our state's community college students by headcount, even though we are only two out of 17. How the large colleges do, then, is often how the state does, and what limits us most is always related to the bottom line. As large colleges, we leverage the power of partnerships and find efficiencies wherever we can – we have to, in order to have a hope of meeting our communities' divergent needs – but it is a constant uphill battle.

Oregon's community colleges work every day to increase the vitality and relevance of our communities, large and small. They are powerful, proven engines of economic mobility. That's why I'm asking you to invest in them. Fully funding community colleges at \$920 million for the 2025-27 biennium isn't just an investment in schools—it's an investment in people, businesses, and the future of Oregon. That's because community colleges WORK for Oregon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.