

April 29, 2025

Dear Senate President Wagner, Speaker Fahey, and members of the Oregon State Legislature:

I am writing in strong support of the Oregon State University STEM Learning and Research Center capital project proposal. This project will provide a major upgrade in physics education that will have lasting impact on the lives of Oregonians. The University's Corvallis campus is home to 3,500 science majors, but STEM education reaches nearly every student including future engineers, teachers, business leaders and graduates in all sectors, even artists and writers. The STEM Learning and Research center will also provide critically needed space for physics-education research and studio classrooms that encourage group interaction, problem-solving, and an expanded hub for learning assistants, science clubs, tutoring, and programs for underrepresented students.

A major feature of the center will be new laboratory space for physics research that will foster progress in key areas such as semiconductors, material science, astrophysics, and clean energy that are directly related to Oregon's economic development. The new laboratories are also needed to maintain OSU's leadership position in cutting edge physics research by promoting projects with regional, national, and global impact. In addition, the science learning exhibits aimed toward K-12 students will capture and encourage young people and shape the next generation of Oregon innovators, entrepreneurs, and engineers.

I am a native Oregonian and proud alumnus of Oregon State University and have lived and worked in Oregon the majority of my life. I grew up in a large family with few resources for college education. Working summers in an asphalt plant to pay for college, I graduated in 1979 with degrees in Crop Science and Biochemistry/Biophysics. My experience at OSU is just one of many examples of how critical OSU is in providing opportunities for Oregonians. When I started at OSU, I had little appreciation of how important scientific education would be in building my career and providing unexpected opportunities. For me, OSU opened the door into medical school and led me to a career as a physician/scientist where I cared for cancer patients for over 20 years and worked as a Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at OHSU. It also enabled me to transition my career into a leadership role in philanthropic drug discovery and development at the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation that helped changed the face of a devastating childhood disease. I have recently retired from CFF and now live in Salem where I continue to consult with non-profit foundations to develop new treatments for rare genetic diseases. None of this would have been possible without the scientific education provided by OSU. While many people don't really think about the enormous benefits of OSU on a day-to-day basis, it is an absolutely critical resource for bettering the lives of Oregonians and building Oregon's future. Maintaining the excellence of this school is extremely important for Oregon.

For five decades I have been amazed at how valuable undergraduate science education is. I have used information learned at OSU at every stage of my career. I now have the opportunity to engage with OSU leaders as a member of the Board of Advisors for the College of Science and

see first-hand how teaching methods have changed over the years. The small-group experiential learning that is increasingly the norm at OSU clearly boosts student engagement and success. The cross disciplinary nature of the STEM Learning and Research Center will have a major impact at multiple levels, from improving all introductory physics classes to maintaining Oregon's leadership in physics at the national and Global levels. I cannot say enough about the potential impact of this project. Enrollment at OSU and particularly in engineering and science, has been increasing steadily. Each year, OSU students collectively take over 300,000 math and science credit hours, regardless of their major. Success in these rigorous foundational courses is crucial. The state-of-the-art teaching facilities in the STEM Learning Center will have a direct and positive impact on the education of thousands of students every year, improving their experiences in the basic sciences and making those experiences more relevant to the real world. There is no question in my mind that the investment made today with this center will pay off in multiples for Oregonians, both financially and personally, in the years and decades to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William R. Skach". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "William" and last name "Skach" clearly legible.

William Skach, MD

Independent Consultant: Charcot Marie Tooth Research Foundation

Retired: Executive Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation