



American Association of University Professors

Academic Freedom for a Free Society

April 30, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Education
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Re: SB 5525 - Support

Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz, and members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is David Johnston, and I am a Senior Instructor of physics at Oregon Tech, our state's polytechnic university, at the Portland-Metro campus located in Wilsonville. I also represent my union, Oregon Tech AAUP, on AAUP Oregon's Legislative Committee. As a member of the community, and on behalf of the more than 6,300 faculty represented by the American Association of University Professors in Oregon, I urge you to support better higher education funding in Oregon's budget for the next biennium. Specifically, we call on you to appropriate \$1.275 billion for the Public University Support Fund, \$920 million for the Community College Support Fund, \$400 million for the Oregon Opportunity Grant, and \$22 million for the Basic Needs Package (HB 3182 and 3183). We urge the Legislature to fully fund these critical programs to ensure all Oregonians can access and succeed in higher education.

Oregon's public universities and community colleges are severely underfunded; a report by the HECC earlier this year ranked Oregon 37th in public funding per student, with funding levels 24% below the national average, and since 2021, every state that borders ours invests more in their community college and public university students than Oregon. This statistic is particularly troublesome for our students, when you consider the fact that our state also ranks near the bottom when it comes to funding for student financial aid.

Without sufficient financial support from the state, Oregon's public universities will close budgetary gaps using the same strategies that universities nationwide typically rely on: raising tuition, slashing services, suppressing wages, and chipping away at working and learning conditions. For example, Oregon Tech's Tuition Recommendation Committee recently approved a 4% tuition increase. Annual tuition increases of this size are not sustainable and leave the dream of a college degree out of reach for too many students.

Additionally, limited resources, outdated equipment, below market salaries for faculty, and high tuition also make it difficult to attract faculty, staff, and prospective students.

We can and must do better for Oregon's students and workers. My own institution, Oregon Tech, serves a vital role for Oregonians, particularly rural Oregonians, but the pandemic, rising tuition, and a host of other challenges has caused enrollment to drop and pushed our university community to the brink. Many of our departments operate on a shoestring budget, which leaves students with fewer resources and older equipment. That's a problem at a polytechnic university that stresses hands-on learning and applied research. Oregon Tech is not alone in this. All of our public universities are struggling, and Western, Eastern, and Southern Oregon Universities, as well as Portland State University, have all been disproportionately impacted by rising budgetary pressures and dropping enrollments. By appropriating \$1.275 billion for the Public University Support Fund, our legislature can begin the multi-year process of bringing public university funding up to the national average.

My students have dreams and aspirations, and we need to support these future scientists, engineers, and professionals so that they can contribute to our state and community at their fullest potential.

Thank you for your dedication to Oregon's university and community college students, staff, and faculty.

David Johnston
Senior Instructor of Physics, Oregon Tech
Vice President, Oregon Tech AAUP