

**Testimony of Sage TeBeest
SEIU Sublocal President at Southern Oregon University
Oregon State Ways and Means Committee**

Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sage TeBeest, and I am the SEIU Sublocal President at Southern Oregon University and the Program Coordinator for the Creative Arts Department. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am here to urge you to support an additional **\$276 million in additional funding for Oregon's public universities support fund**. This investment is critical not just for students and staff, but for the future of Oregon's economy and the stability of our communities.

At a time when the federal Department of Education is facing unprecedented attacks, it is more important than ever that Oregon steps up to protect and strengthen our higher education system. We cannot afford to wait for federal leadership when the needs of our students and workforce are immediate and growing.

Artificial intelligence is already beginning to displace jobs across sectors—from transportation to healthcare to education itself. Without proactive investment in our public universities, we will not have the infrastructure to educate, retrain, and reskill the thousands of Oregonians whose livelihoods are at risk.

Public universities like Southern Oregon University are essential to preparing the next generation of workers and helping current workers transition into new roles. By funding higher education at the level it deserves, you are not just investing in classrooms—you are investing in Oregon's ability to respond to economic disruption, to reduce pressure on our social safety net, and to protect access to housing and healthcare.

I ask that you support the additional \$276 million in university funding—not as a cost, but as a strategic investment in a resilient and future-ready Oregon.

Again, thank you for your time.