

**Testimony of Sage TeBeest
SEIU Sublocal President, Southern Oregon University
Before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Education**

Co-Chairs and Members of the Subcommittee,

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

I am here to urge you to support **an additional \$276 million in funding for Oregon's public universities**. This is not just an investment in our higher education institutions—it is a critical response to one of the most significant workforce and economic transformations of our time: the rise of artificial intelligence.

AI is no longer theoretical—it's reshaping industries now. In Oregon and across the country, we are already seeing automation and machine learning begin to displace workers in sectors like logistics, customer service, healthcare administration, education, and even software development. According to multiple labor market studies, millions of jobs are at risk of partial or full automation in the next decade.

This disruption will have cascading effects. Workers who lose jobs without pathways to retraining will increasingly rely on our social safety nets—on Medicaid, housing assistance, unemployment benefits, and mental health services. Without access to affordable, high-quality education and training, we risk widening inequality, fueling economic instability, and placing unsustainable pressure on public systems.

Public universities are uniquely positioned to serve as the front line in Oregon's response. Institutions like Southern Oregon University are already providing the education, certification, and career pathway programs that help people transition into stable, family-wage jobs in growing fields—like green energy, healthcare, education, and skilled trades. But without increased state investment, our ability to scale these programs and reach the Oregonians who need them most is limited.

Meanwhile, the federal Department of Education is under sustained political attack, and future federal support is uncertain. In this moment, Oregon must act with vision and urgency. We must fund our public universities to build the infrastructure—not just physical, but human and academic—that will carry our workforce through this transition and into the future.

The requested \$276 million is not a luxury. It is a strategic, preventative investment that will reduce downstream costs to the state in social services, emergency housing, and public health, while expanding opportunity for working Oregonians.

I urge you to support this funding and help build a more resilient, more prepared Oregon.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to our state's future.