



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

Oregon State Legislature
State Capitol
Salem, OR

NEWS RELEASE

February 6, 2014

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Senate looks to make community college more affordable

SB 1524A orders study of the 'Oregon Promise' for two years of free community college courses

SALEM – This morning the Oregon Senate voted 29-0 to approve the study of a concept to provide free community college to Oregon high school graduates. Senate Bill 1524A directs the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to examine the possibility of opening the doors of community college to high school graduates without requiring them to pay tuition or fees.

“Oregon needs welders, mechanics, and medical technicians. We don’t need a growing population of untrained and unemployed,” said Senator Mark Hass (D-Beaverton), chair of the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee. “Two years of community college is a lot less than a lifetime on food stamps.”

The concept for free community college, dubbed the “Oregon Promise,” would extend two years of free community college education to students. Within that two-year time period, students could obtain an Associate’s degree, a certificate of learning, or earn credits that can transfer towards a Bachelor’s degree at a four-year university. If the HECC finds the concept feasible for implementation, the commission will propose criteria to the Oregon Legislature later this year.

The intent is also to require these students to maintain a level of responsibility. Students will need to keep decent grades, show up for school, and stay out of trouble.

“As a community college teacher for 33 years, I’ve watched the cost of college make higher education seem like an impossible dream for more and more students,” said Senator Michael Dembrow (D-Portland). “This must change, and this legislation is part of the critical conversation on making higher education attainable for all Oregonians”

Currently, Oregon community college students pay an average of nearly \$4,000 per year in tuition and fees. That price tag serves as a barrier for Oregonians who cannot afford higher education. For those who do enroll, many end up with student loan debt.

“Increasingly, Oregonians need job training and a specific set of skills to get a good-paying job,” said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland). “By making community college more affordable, we can expand access to higher education and skills training for Oregonians of all ages. It’s a critical component of the Senate Democrats’ legislative agenda for this session.”

The bill now goes to the Oregon House of Representatives for consideration.

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