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CONTACT: Rick Osborn 503-986-1074
Rick.osborn@oregonlegislature.gov

Parents shouldn't be able to buy college spots for their kids

Legislative proposal would define donating in exchange for admissions as bribery

SALEM – Wealthy families shouldn't be able to buy seats in Oregon's college and university classrooms.

Sen. Rob Wagner (D-Lake Oswego) introduced a bill today that will enforce that philosophy among Oregon's institutions of higher learning. Senate Bill 1038 defines giving large amounts of money in exchange for admission of an individual at a public college or university as bribery.

"Students should get into college based on their merits and potential, and not the size of their bank account," Wagner said. "One of the great things about public higher education is that it levels the playing field. If we allow the wealthy to buy their way into our colleges, we are turning our backs on the equity that we are supposed to be promoting."

In cases where bribery is found to have occurred, the institution receiving the bribe would be required to donate an equal amount to the Student Equity Fund. The money from that fund – established in the Oregon State Treasury – would continuously be appropriated to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for scholarships.

"Senate Bill 1038 is an important step in assuring fair and equal access to education for all Oregon students, regardless of socioeconomic background," Oregon Student Association Executive Director Torii Uyehara said. "We urge our legislators to vote yes."

Wagner filed the bill in response to recent news reports of wealthy and often high-profile parents buying their kids' way into college with huge donations. Earlier this month, the United States Department of Justice charged 50 people nationwide in the largest college-admissions scandal in recent memory.

"This will prevent people from giving unfair advantages to students who come from well-off families," Wagner said. "It also will help to promote more first-generation students and children from struggling families attending college, by funding scholarships to help them cover the cost of their education."

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