

Dear HECC Commissioners,

I am writing you as the president of SEIU 503 Sublocal 84, the classified staff union at Southern Oregon University, to ask you to support SOU by expediting the modifications, currently under a workgroup review, to the Regional Stability funding for Oregon's public universities. We recognize that this change should be done in a way to ensure all public universities are supported equitably. We ask that this change be made as soon as possible to address the emergency at SOU.

Southern Oregon University employs nearly 200 workers in our bargaining unit. Since the first week of May, we have been on a 20% to 40% furlough, and we are scheduled to remain furloughed through December 31, 2020. SOU is considering extending the furloughs through summer of 2021 if the HECC funding model remains disadvantageous to us, and layoffs are still on the table.

The workers I represent are some of the lowest-paid and most vulnerable employees in the entire university system. They are already suffering under the furloughs while we wait for the Work Share unemployment benefits to arrive. Morale is low because workers fear that the furloughs will not be enough to offset SOU's financial hemorrhaging. Many of them wonder whether they will still have a job next year, and I do not know what to tell them.

SOU is not able to solve its financial problems by simply raising tuition to offset the loss of revenue. That would not be fair to the students, and it would likely backfire in the form of decreased enrollment. We do not know what to expect from the state of Oregon or the federal government in terms of emergency aid. What we do know is that SOU is disadvantaged by the current HECC funding model, and addressing that inequity is our top priority.

We had inadequate fund reserves when SOU exited the Oregon University System, and we have been trying to dig out of that hole ever since. We believe this problem has been exacerbated by a lack of education funding from the state and an inequitable distribution formula. Given the difficult economic times we are facing, we understand this is likely to get worse. We are asking that you do what you can to stabilize SOU's budget now and look to address the structural problems that got us here.

Oregon needs to take a fresh look at how it invests in SOU. Our university may not be large, but it is an important regional educator and employer. We have amazing, talented people at our campus in the student body and among the faculty and staff. Our president, Linda Schott, is focused on making SOU a university for the future. For example, we are expanding partnerships in our region through the Southern Oregon Higher Education Consortium (SOHEC) to create smoother pathways for students to receive a higher education. SOU has the potential to accomplish great things in our region and beyond, but we need your support to do that. We need a stable financial foundation upon which to erect our vision.

We are not asking for special treatment or a handout. What we want is equitable investment from the HECC. We hope that you will use your power to address inequities in the funding formula to help address the structural budget issues at SOU so we do not end up in this situation again. You could alleviate much anxiety at our campus, save jobs, and help protect our regional economy.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of our proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Raco".

David Raco

President of SEIU 503, Sublocal 84 at Southern Oregon University