Budget Oral Testimony Template – Option 3

*Note: Please keep testimonies to under 2 minutes long.*

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, and Members of the Committee,

My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am here today representing [YOUR COLLEGE] to express our strong support for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission's request for $855 million in ongoing funding and $50 million in one-time funding for the Community College Support Fund. This level of investment will allow community colleges to maintain many critical programs and services, but reductions will still be necessary at many colleges, including [YOUR COLLEGE].

Community colleges serve students at all education and skill levels, including those with the greatest barriers to post-secondary education and training. Nationwide, open-access institutions like community colleges saw the greatest enrollment declines during the pandemic, while highly selective universities saw the least decline. This will lead to greater educational and economic inequities if colleges don’t have the capacity to re-engage those learners.

Although federal relief dollars helped make up for significant declines in tuition revenue caused by the pandemic shutdowns, those dollars are now gone, and colleges are facing a fiscal cliff. Even as enrollment declined, demand for mental health and wrap-around services increased significantly.

However, enrollment is now beginning to leveling off, with enrollment returning at many colleges in the more expensive career and technical education programs, as well as short-term career certificate programs. For example, [GIVE EXAMPLES OF LOCAL PROGRAMS SEEING GROWTH]. The HECC’s recommended investment level would help colleges maintain capacity in many programs as students return.

As baby boomers retire, employers are having trouble finding trained workers. Adults with some college but no certificate or degree are the largest group when looking at Oregonians by education levels. Community colleges are best positioned to serve these learners. Typically, community college enrollment runs counter-cyclical to unemployment. When unemployment is high, enrollment surges and low unemployment leads to an enrollment decline at colleges. If unemployment increases, colleges will need program capacity to help workers retrain and get back into the workforce.

Therefore, we urge you to support the HECC's request for $855 million in ongoing funding and $50 million in one-time funding. This level of investment will enable community colleges to continue to adapt to changing student needs and provide bridge funding for colleges as they make reductions. For example, when a college cuts a program, they try to teach-out the remaining students so cost savings are not immediate. With your support, community colleges can continue to serve the students who need them the most and provide the skilled workers Oregon's employers need to thrive.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.