

July 23, 2020

To: Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
From: Nathaniel Brown, Oregon Business & Industry (OBI)
RE: OBI Testimony in Support of Maintaining Resources for Engineering Technology Sustaining Fund

Dear co-chairs Frederick and McLain, and members of the committee:

On behalf of Oregon Business & Industry's (OBI) membership of more than 1,600 businesses that employ nearly 330,000 people in the state, I write in support of maintaining current funding levels for the Engineering Technology Sustaining Fund (ETSF). Just like thousands of business owners throughout the state, the Legislature is now tasked with making difficult decisions to try and balance the budget and mitigate the economic crisis brought on by COVID-19. We understand and appreciate the enormity of your responsibility during these challenging times.

Long before the pandemic, OBI has prioritized the establishment of stable, strategic, and evidence-based investments that result in measurable outcomes in student achievement. Now more than ever, we urge you to protect the funding for ETSF as specifically noted in the draft budget plan released by Co-chairs Steiner Hayward, Rayfield and Johnson last week.

Maintaining funding for engineering education at our postsecondary institutions helps sustain a diverse workforce in the very industries positioned to lead our state and country out of the current health and economic crisis. Indeed, with these funds in recent years, Oregon State University and the Oregon Institute of Technology have reportedly doubled the number of female engineering faculty, and Portland State University and the University of Oregon have increased their minority representation to 37% 50%, respectively, within graduate internships and related programs. This work must continue uninterrupted.

Students that graduate with engineering-related degrees have significantly more opportunities for higher-wage and high-demand jobs, increasing economic mobility for themselves and their families. As our elected officials deliberate which programs to maintain and which cuts to make, OBI encourages you to protect the ETSF for these reasons.

This program is proven to lead to better educational outcomes and our economy benefits when more Oregonians have access to higher education and, specifically, the engineering education funded through this essential program. As our state collectively recovers from the crisis at hand, it is imperative that Oregon's students are prepared to adapt to a new economic reality. We simply cannot afford to reduce funding for the ETSF.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue for our state's workforce. We appreciate and echo the bipartisan acknowledgement of education as a top priority during this crisis and beyond. OBI is ready and able to partner with the state Legislature, postsecondary institutions, the Oregon Department of Education, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, and others, to ensure the continued success of Oregon's students.

Contact: Nathaniel Brown, OBI, nathanielbrown@oregonbusinessindustry.com