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The Honorable Susan Bonilla
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 4140
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 798 [Support in concept]

Dear Assembly Member Bonilla:

The Academic Senate of the California State University [ASCSU] has taken a support in concept position on AB 798 as amended on 4 September. The bill creates an Open Educational Resources Adoption Incentive [AI] that would provide funding to enable increased use of open educational resources [OER].

The ASCSU is sensitive to the reality that the cost of college has been rising steadily over the last several decades, increasing even more dramatically during the recent economic downturn. While the CSU continues to be among the most affordable public universities in the country, the total cost per year for our students can be a significant barrier to attending and completing college.

The average student pays about \$1,300 each year for books and course materials and in some disciplines nearly double that. Obviously the high cost of books and other course materials can impact success as some students are unable to purchase the materials and find themselves sharing a book among a group of students or resorting to a library copy. Increasing use of OER would reduce that average cost and increase accessibility and availability of books and other course materials.

While there are open educational resources available for some courses and more being developed use of these resources is not widespread, in part because faculty aren't aware of them but more frequently because faculty don't have the time, resources and support to identify appropriate OER materials and to reframe their courses to make use of OER materials. The AI seeks to provide the missing resources and support. We believe this can and should be an important continuation of the work of the California Open Educational Resources Council [CA OERC]. Importantly, use of OER materials is at the discretion of faculty, following the time-honored practice of academic freedom.

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We also stress that we support AB 798's focus on open educational resources rather than “digital materials” more broadly construed. While we appreciate the efforts of publishers to produce what they refer to as “affordable digital materials”, we believe the appropriate focus for this bill is open educational materials. That belief is primarily based on two issues. One, “affordable” is not a definitive term, and we are sensitive to the fact that the clear intent of the bill is to minimize costs for students, something more fully accomplished by open educational resources. Second, open educational resources are defined by their use of some version of a Creative Commons license, which enables faculty to use, modify and distribute those resources as they determine best. A significant part of the argument for adoption of open educational resources is the facility for customization and open use inherent to open educational materials but not to “affordable digital resources.”

ASCSU's position of support in concept reflects our concern over the cost of educational materials to our students. We appreciate very much your willingness to work with faculty and students in all segments of public higher education in California.

Sincerely,



Steven Filling
Chair
Academic Senate of the California State University