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ABOR Amplifies Its Call to Mitigate Cuts to Higher Education

Position Maintains Commitment to Keep Arizona's Public Universities Affordable and Accessible

(Tucson, Ariz.) – With significant cuts to Arizona's public universities being considered by the Arizona State Legislature, the Arizona Board of Regents today adopted a unified position that reductions should be limited in size and duration, with triggers in the state budget that enable funding for the universities to increase as soon as the state's budget position improves to prevent further erosion of the universities' share of state General Fund support. The board also called for the state to adopt its regulatory reform agenda, which includes initiatives to enhance operational flexibility and entrepreneurialism at the universities resulting in increased efficiencies and cost savings. The board's position amplifies its priority to stave off unnecessary cost shifts to Arizona families.

The governor's fiscal year 2016 executive budget calls for a general fund reduction of \$77.5 million to the university system, which represents a 10 percent cut, though the legislature could be considering further cuts.

"There is a real potential that the legislature's budget proposal could include cuts to Arizona's public universities beyond what Gov. Ducey proposed," said ABOR President Eileen I. Klein. "The trend of defunding our universities goes against the state's goals for economic growth and creating opportunity for all Arizonans."

"Arizona's public university system is foundational to the state's economic prosperity, yet our state leads the nation in funding cuts, significantly impeding our ability to be competitive and, more importantly, to serve our students," said ABOR Chair Mark Killian. "Arizona's students and families simply cannot be the backstop to the fiscal challenges that our policymakers are trying to solve."

Arizona's universities were hit particularly hard during the Great Recession. From 2007-12, per-student state funding decreased by 50 percent and tuition doubled. At the same time enrollment increased 17 percent, or 23,000 students.

The board advocates that any cuts to the universities be given in a lump sum to the board to be managed by the board's Enterprise Executive Committee, comprised of the universities' and board presidents. The governor's budget currently calls for reductions to the universities based on enrollment. The committee will provide a recommended methodology to the board to ensure cuts are managed equitably and in a way that does not undermine the progress on our enterprise approach to budgeting. The presidents also will engage their campus communities in the process to determine where cuts will be made.

“It is time to tackle head-on the real issue, which is creating a sustainable model for our state’s public higher education system,” Klein said. “We look forward to working with legislators to develop this model that enables the board to stay true to its mission of access and affordability for all Arizona residents and to allow our university system to be the catalyst for strong economic growth in our state. Any reductions will be made thoughtfully with input from key university constituencies.”

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