

March 23, 2020

Co-Chairs Roblan and Holvey and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your leadership in this time of crisis and for focusing on the urgent needs of Oregon's most vulnerable citizens as we all confront COVID-19 together.

Like you, community colleges are focused on ensuring that many of our students, who are already on the economic margins, are not only able to continue with their education, but also more importantly, do not lose housing or the ability to pay for basic necessities because of lost wages, interrupted financial aid, and other major disruptions. Community college students already face unacceptably high rates of housing and food insecurity and shouldering this further exceptional burden will make their circumstances even more precarious.

The social distancing required to combat the virus will likely lead to monumental declines in community college enrollment, forcing layoffs for many faculty as fewer courses are needed to meet the demand. This will have a profound effect on the lives and livelihoods of those employees, the institutions, and their communities. In rural areas, community colleges are often among the largest employers in a community. In many cases, various career and technical education programs will not be offered in spring term because they require the kinds of hands-on face-to-face instruction that is currently not possible. In the longer term, we must work to ensure the recovery of these programs and the vital workforce pipelines they fill.

Looking to the short-term urgent needs of the state in fighting the spread of the virus and protecting our most vulnerable citizens, colleges would urge the committee to consider the following solutions:

- 1. Include Students in Rental Assistance Efforts:** As many community college students have lost wages over the past week due to layoffs in service-related industries, they will struggle to pay rent or mortgages forcing many into homelessness. Any rental assistance efforts should include, at the very least, Pell eligible students.
- 2. Increase and Expedite SNAP Eligibility for College Students:** A recent study by the HOPE Laboratory of Temple University, showed the 41 percent students faced food insecurity over a 30-day period in the fall of 2019. Oregon has been a leader in combining federal benefits for students, and we urge to committee to further support these efforts.
- 3. Access to Health Care:** With potentially profound decreases to enrollment and tuition revenue due to social distancing measures, colleges will not have the ability to employ the same number of instructors and other types of employees. Moreover. our students

already face challenges accessing health care or may have recently lost employer health care due to layoffs. We urge the committee to support these Oregonians by ensuring their access to health care.

4. Support Expanded Unemployment Insurance: With both students and college employees facing lost wages, we urge to committee to provide support for broadened access and duration of unemployment insurance.

We greatly appreciate the scope of the challenge before all of us and thank you for your unwavering leadership throughout this crisis. Community colleges stand ready to engage in finding the solutions to help navigate out of this crisis and to help our students, employees, and communities recover in its aftermath. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

John Wykoff
Deputy Director, OCCA
wykoff@occa17.com