



**Testimony of Becky Straus, Legislative Director  
In Support of HB 2787  
Senate Committee on Education  
March 19, 2013**

Chair Hass and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to express our support for HB 2787, which seeks to expand access to education for Oregon's high school graduates, regardless of where they were born or their current immigration status. Our organization has a proud history of advocating for the fair treatment of all persons here in Oregon. We support HB 2787 because it is an important step towards ensuring that Oregon's laws treat all students fairly.

**A smart and fair improvement to benefit all of Oregon**

All Oregonians deserve fair access to the high quality and affordable educational opportunities provided by the Oregon's colleges and universities. Ensuring that access substantially furthers principals of fundamental fairness. Students who will benefit from HB 2787 are, by and large, talented high-achievers who arrived in Oregon as children as the result of choices made by their parents. These students grew up in Oregon, they persevered against the odds to excel, they graduated from Oregon high schools, and they are otherwise eligible for admission to an Oregon college or university on equal terms with their friends and classmates. HB 2787 will modestly ensure that many students in Oregon who cannot prove lawful presence can nonetheless access the educational opportunities that they have already earned.

Furthermore, many of the undocumented students who stand to benefit from this bill are likely to become legal residents or American citizens under either current or future immigration laws. For this reason, denying these students access to an affordable college education is shortsighted. These students—who are our neighbors, our friends, and often our family members—are already an integral part of the Oregon community. There is an indisputably strong correlation between increased educational opportunities for young people and improved life chances in later years. And, having already established roots in Oregon, students who have graduated from Oregon high schools are likely to remain in the state upon graduating from an Oregon college or university and continue to contribute to this state's vibrancy.

**It is time for Oregon to join the national trend toward Tuition Equity**

To date, twelve states have laws allowing students who meet specific requirements, regardless of their status, to pay in-state tuition rates at public post-secondary institutions: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, and Washington. Rhode Island's Board of Governors for Higher Education adopted a policy permitting eligible students to pay in-state tuition rates, regardless of their status. Minnesota offers a "flat" tuition rate to students, regardless of their status. New Mexico, Texas,

and California provide access to state financial aid to students who meet certain criteria, regardless of status. Illinois established a "DREAM" fund commission to raise money for scholarships to help children of immigrants.

2013 presents an opportunity for additional states to make similar progress, including Oregon. Colorado is likely to enact a tuition equity bill this year. Tuition equity bills also have been introduced in Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, and New Jersey. Similar bills are expected in Arkansas and Pennsylvania.

Bills in Connecticut and New York would provide access to state financial aid for eligible students regardless of status. Something similar is likely in Washington.

It is time for Oregon to move Tuition Equity forward. We request that you move HB 2787 to the Senate floor. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. Please feel free to be in touch at any time with comments or questions.