

March 27, 2013

OUS Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Public hearing for HB 5031

Dear Co-Chair Komp, Co-Chair Monroe, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and to express my support for the Oregon University System's essential role in our state. My name is Ashley Wilkins, I am a native Oregonian and an alumna of the Oregon University System. I grew up in a rural community outside of Portland, and I am the first in my family to attend and graduate from college. Unsure of what it meant to be a college student and how to navigate large educational institutions, I took a non-traditional route to completing my degree. Shortly after I began at the University of Oregon in my freshman year, I transferred to Portland Community College where I received my transfer degree, and finished my Bachelor's at Portland State University.

My educational experience ignited a passion within me to empower others in their paths to higher education, and since graduating in 2009, I have worked in local education nonprofits focused on increasing college access for underrepresented students. I currently work at a college access program in Portland that supports low income, ethnic minority, and first generation students to get into college and secure financial aid.

While I didn't know it as a college student, I now understand the tremendous benefit a unified system like OUS has in ensuring access and affordability for all Oregonians to attend and graduate from college. My college experience would not have been the same without the behind the scenes work of a state-wide system like OUS, coordinating and advocating for policies that benefit all of Oregon's students in terms of affordability, accessibility, and ensuring ease of access to and between institutions.

My college education has completely changed my life, providing access to better opportunities and a meaningful career. It is what motivates me to do my part to ensure continued access and opportunity for Oregon's future students, and it is what compels me to express support for this system and increased state funding of higher education. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.

Sincerely,

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