



Oregon

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Oregon Student Access Commission

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**Testimony for Public Hearing on House Bill 2095
Peggy Cooksey, Grants Administrator**

Good afternoon, Chair Hass, Vice Chairs Knopp, and members of the Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development. For the record, my name is Peggy Cooksey, and I am a Grants Administrator for the Oregon Student Access Commission (OSAC). I am here today to testify on House Bill 2095. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.

The Oregon Student Access Commission administers over 450 privately funded scholarships, the Oregon Opportunity Grant, and a variety of government funded programs including the Chafee Education and Training Grant for former foster youth. Additionally, we are home to ASPIRE (Access to Student Assistance Programs In Reach of Everyone), a mentoring program that matches trained and supportive adult volunteer mentors with middle and high school students to develop a plan to help students meet their education goals beyond high school.

The purpose of HB 2095 is to align the definition of “former foster child” for the tuition waiver program created in 2011 with the federal standard for purposes of higher education grants, tuition waivers and scholarships. HB 3471 from 2011 created a tuition and waiver program for former foster youth. The bill tweaked old statutory language from 2001 that created a scholarship for former foster youth. That scholarship program was funded only for the 2001-03 biennium. In the original bill, the foster youth must have been in substitute care for a period of 12 months after the 16th birthday.

Since 2004, OSAC has partnered with the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) to administer application, awarding, and disbursement of the federal Chafee Education and Training Voucher program. HB2095 would define a former foster child in as an individual who, for a total of six or more months while between 14 and 21 years of age, was a ward of the court and not dismissed from care before reaching 16 years of age or an Indian child subject to the Indian Child Welfare Act under the jurisdiction of a tribal court for out-of-home placement and not dismissed from care before reaching 16 years of age. This revised definition would match the federal definition of a foster youth or former foster youth for the purposes of postsecondary grants, tuition waivers, and scholarships.

In order to provide equity to the foster/former foster youth of Oregon seeking postsecondary educations, aligning the eligibility definition of the Tuition and Waiver program with the Chafee Education and Training Grant makes sense. If both programs have the same eligibility definition, there will not be a subset of Chafee ETG recipients who are ineligible for the Tuition and Fee Waiver because they left care prior to spending a year in care after their 16th birthday. Passage of HB 2095 would make it easier for both the OSAC and DHS to determine eligibility for both programs and would remove confusion about program eligibility for foster youth as they enter college.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to answering your questions.

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