



Hello Senator Hass and member of the committee.

My name is Merriam Weatherhead and I am the Board Chair for the Oregon Student Association and Student Body President for Lane Community College. OSA represents over 100,000 students in public community colleges and universities statewide. Today I am here to speak in support of Treasure Wheeler's Opportunity Initiative. Student Body Presidents from all around the state unanimously support this initiative because this plan builds a sustainable model for Oregon's neediest families. Right now only 2 out of every 10 "maximum need students" receive the award. This leaves thousands of students who qualify for need based aid with limited options. Students who want to go to college, but don't believe they can afford it. I have been part of that 80% of people who qualify for the award but don't receive it.

I come from a low income family and throughout high school college always seemed unattainable because there was no way for my family to afford it. So when I finally sat down and filled out my FASFA and application to attend LCC, the deadline for the Oregon Opportunity Grant had already passed. Community colleges have rolling admissions and due to budget cuts, the OOG operates on a university schedule which doesn't. My first term I was among the 8 out of 10 students who qualified and applied for the OOG but didn't receive it, this financial barrier did have a huge impact on my education. Spring term of my first year I barely paid for rent and couldn't afford to buy books so I didn't purchase a single book that term. That meant I spent all the time I could studying in the library with outdated textbooks that I could only check out for 2 hours a time. These challenges unfortunately did effect whether I could get As or whether I got Bs. I am lucky to be in the know now and have received the OOG for the last two years. The grant means that I can help pay for rent and food for my family and purchase books, unfortunately I still will have considerable debt after college.

This grant means more to recipients like myself than just help to go to college. This grant shows my little brother that with hard work and effort, that Oregon cares about his education and ultimately, his future. It means that instead of living off of food stamps or waiting in line for food box like so many times in my childhood, that I'll be able to get a higher paying job, support my family, that I'll be able to be donate and volunteer with my local food bank. This grant is an

opportunity, it's an opportunity to low income students that just want an education so they can contribute to society at their fullest. When Oregon prioritized this grant, it shows students like myself that Oregon believes that education should be accessible and affordable to low income Oregonians. I know that recipients like myself believe in Oregon in return. It's a small investment when in the future the state will get back in tenfold from higher income taxes, a trained workforce, and strong communities. You are not just investing in my future, your investing in my children's future and theirs after that, you're investing in Oregon's future. In a study from the National Center for Educational Statistics released in 2001, 82% of high school graduates whose parents had a bachelor's degree or higher enrolled in college immediately after high school whereas only 54% for graduates whose parents only had a high school diploma and 36% for those whose parents never graduated high school.

This grant is crucial to low income students like myself and I am very excited about the proposal for the Oregon Opportunity Initiative. This helps make education in Oregon a real possibility for low income students and ultimately, will help Oregon reach 40-40-20.

We are asking for your support. I would be happy to take any questions.