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Testimony in support of Senate Bill 11 – The Oregon Opportunity Initiative for Senate
Education and Work Force Development Committee

Dear Chairman Hass and Committee Members:

My name is Michael Mikeworth I am a fifty year old full time college student. As a non-traditional student, today I'd like to let you know a little bit about who I am, and why I'm asking for your support of Senate Bill 11 – the Oregon Opportunity Initiative.

I have been on the Presidents list and honor roll since I returned to Portland Community College last year. I major in Computer Science and I am on track to receive an AAS in Network Administration, specializing in Network security. I will also have three certificates when I am done. I am also part of a proud cohort of interns here at the State Capitol from PCC; I chose to do this to be of service to the school.

I have been a product of the community college system all my adult life –continuing to learn and skill up to meet the changing demands of the modern world of work. After I finished at the Delphian school in 1980 I already knew I wanted to be a chef. I spent the next couple years cooking at the Grand Canyon and in Portland. Then I enrolled at PCC and went through the now extinct Commercial Food Prep program and Kitchen Management Program. I worked full time at Jakes Crawfish also during this time. I spent the next 15 years working my way up to Executive chef. Due to the education I received from PCC, I was able to work with many great chefs (Caprial Pence, Certified French Master Chef Roland Henin, Bruce Livingston and Tony Demes). I paid for my coursework out of my own pocket back then. An education at PCC cost less back then and as the Oregonian noted this week; we're quickly pricing lower-income Oregonians like myself out of a chance to learn the skills needed to thrive in this economy.

The life of a chef is hard. You spend 12 to 16 hours a day in a kitchen sometimes seven days a week. You really don't make a lot of money, especially when you look at the number of hours you work. In the mid 90's after a company I was working for went public, my position fell victim to restructuring. When I was in the unemployment office I noticed a bulletin about a workers retraining program for computer science jobs. I saw that High Tech was a growing field. I signed up and took some computer science classes at community college and in a couple terms I was able to interview for technical jobs.

I was hired as a Tech support supervisor by a tax software company. I spent the next few years managing in tech support then I finally reached my goal of becoming a Quality Assurance Engineer, where I tested software and hardware. My entire career in the high tech fields, I was making far more money than I did as a Chef. I also paid more in taxes and I was able to spend more as a consumer. I also had great benefits for myself and my son. I was able to spend a lot more time with my son as well, which to me was the best part of my career change.

Like many things between 2004 and 2008 the QA business changed, companies were no longer hiring permanent testing staff. Instead they would hire you as a contractor for 3 to 18 months. After the crash of 2008 I was not even offered Medical insurance any longer, and due to the fact that I had early stage arthritis I could no longer purchase insurance on my own because of this preexisting condition. I have been living without health insurance had insurance since 2008.

In the middle of the economic downturn, between 2008 and 2010, I was constantly on the hunt for a new position where I could get benefits. I interviewed many times and I kept falling just a little short being told I was the second choice. Mostly due to the fact that automated testing had become a large part of the testing process and the QA engineers were now expected to write the scripts to do this instead of the Software Engineers, which was the way it had been previous to this time period.

I knew that I needed again, go back to school and began applying for financial aid. My original plan was to get a degree and learn to be a programmer/scripter. I also decided to go to school full time as opposed to trying to work and do it part time. I started in the winter term of 2012. I have been getting mostly A's. I believe this has been due to the fact that I have been able to get financial aid and I didn't have to work. It hasn't been easy to live on a student's budget especially at my age.

Since I have been back in school I have decided to change to Network Administration specializing in Network Security. This is growing field and we do not have a lot of American students going into this field at this point in time. As a matter of fact in all the years of working for software and hardware companies I have met very few Oregon born workers in these fields. As a proud Oregonian, this is something I would like to see corrected – growing our own talent right here.

I would like to point out that as of the fall term of 2012, 26% of students enrolled at PCC are like me and over the age of 40. Many of the students in my age group are not back in school for a four year degree. We are looking to improve our skills sets, and to make us more marketable in today's ever changing market place. We can do this with an AA degree, or one of the many certificate programs. In today's market place you can't even get a job as a mechanic or in manufacturing without some kind of post high school education.

Oregon has a chance to make a first in history again. With SJR 1 and SB 11 we can fund future Oregon students in the long term not just the short term.

I did some research on the Oregon Opportunity Initiative. I find it to be a fiscally prudent way to fund our future students. As the Oregon Opportunity Grant can only fund 20% of the students that qualify with SB 11 and SJ1, you will be providing access to education and skill training for students who will be paying that back over the next few decades

I would urge the Senate to seriously look at this bond program to fund grants for Oregon students for our future. I know from talking to many high tech executives over the years, that Oregon's education level is one of the factors that prevent more business from coming to Oregon. This applies to manufacturers as well. My hope is by making long term funding available over the course of the next couple decades we can improve our state from within by achieving the 40/40/20 plan.

This help solves Oregon's financial woes by increasing the average income level in Oregon. I have already done this myself by paying higher taxes in Oregon since the 90's and will be happy to increase that even more after I finish my current education at PCC. I believe this investment will exponentially increase Oregon's tax revenue over the next couple decades as a result of more students graduating, based on funding like we get as a result of SJR 1 and SB 11.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today

Michael Mikeworth
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