



THE
BUS
PROJECT

TO: House Committee on Higher Education

FR: Aaron Brown, Outreach Coordinator at the Bus Project

DA: March 6th, 2015

Re: Testimony in support of House Bill 2662, The Pay It Forward Pilot

My name is Aaron Brown and I am here today to urge your support for HB 2662, The Pay It Forward pilot. I currently serve as the outreach coordinator for the Oregon Bus Project, an organization focused on engaging young people in the democratic process by making it fun and accessible.

Today's youth have less access to a public higher education than their parents. Gone are the days when you could work all summer and save enough to pay for your college in the fall. Tuition in the US has risen an astonishing 1,120 percent in the last thirty years. The situation is worse in Oregon where we are disappointingly 47th in public higher education spending. That means that for the majority of prospective students in Oregon there are really only two options. You either pay for your education outright or you take out loans.

After graduation students are already behind. While tuition and debt have risen over the last 3 decades wages have not. Graduates are on average \$27,000 in debt and have to compete for low wage, entry level jobs in a job market that is slow to recover from the economic collapse a few years ago. These are the lucky ones. Youth who forgo a degree face a job market that dooms them to low, stagnant wages and dependent on public services to make up the difference, as more and more good jobs require a degree.

It's no wonder that tackling student debt is now a top priority for voters under 40. Unfortunately, as decision makers continue to ignore access to a debt-free and affordable education and other priorities for youth, youth are less and less civically engaged. They just don't see decision makers paying attention to their issues.

Expanding options for students to be able attain a degree without incurring debilitating debt would not only restore faith for young voters in our political system, it would create a path for more of Oregon's youth contribute to our state's economy.

That's why we like Pay It Forward. Pay It Forward creates a debt-free option for students to attain a degree, which in turn will allow students to contribute to the Oregon economy sooner, all while having a built in mechanism for students to help other students.

We see the Pay It Forward pilot as a great solution that would work in concert with existing grant aid, part time work and yes, even loans. I urge you vote yes and move HB 2662, the Pay It Forward pilot out of committee.

Tremendous thanks for your time.