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March 24th, 2015

To: Senate Education Committee
From: Manuel Mejia Gonzalez
RE: SB 932 Access to Opportunity

Chair Roblan, Vice Chair Knopp and Members of the Committee,

My name is Manuel Mejia Gonzalez. I am current student at Lane Community College, and Multicultural Programs Coordinator with its' residing student Government. I am here today to ask you to support Senate Bill 932, tuition equity 2.0.

I am an incredibly rare exception, I am a student who was undocumented and later became a permanent resident of the United States.

I have always been taught to persevere when I truly believe in something. The whole reason I am currently the United States and about to become the first in my family to graduate from a post-secondary education institution is because of the enduring spirit that my mother has planted in me. I saw my mother take her three children to another country, all not speaking a single word of English and work seven days a week, all for my two younger sisters and I to have a better life and the right to pursue happiness.

Like all students, I have dreams. Mine are dreams of helping my community to be the best that it can be and dreams to help folks who like me have to endure less privileged lives. After I graduate as a PhD in Psychology, I want to come back to Lane Community College and become a professor.

I love being involved in my community. Today I am the Multicultural Programs Coordinator for the Associated Students of Lane Community College (ASLCC), an Oregon Student of Color Coalition (OSCC) board member, the Lane County League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Youth Council President, and a Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) member.

I would not be involved if it was not because of my immense, and I repeat immense privilege. I am very privileged to be a recipient of the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) and be supported by my state.

However, many students like me currently do not have access to this aid. My friend, let's call her Rosa, was forced to decide whether she would buy groceries or books at the beginning of this term. Rosa skipped breakfast or would sometimes only have oatmeal.



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While I am taking 17 credits next term, Rosa has to take 8 credits so she can work a 35 hour week to pay her rent, books, tuition, and sometimes, groceries.

While Rosa is a very self-driven, incredibly smart and dedicated individual. There is no way in which Rosa can finish community college in 3 years, needless to say, Rosa will not get a Bachelors in the remaining 2 either.

I respectfully ask the Committee to vote "yes" on Senate bill 932, so Rosa and other tuition equity eligible students can access the Oregon Opportunity Grant, remove the 3 year "grace" period from time of high school graduation before initially enrolling in a public university so that Rosa can finish community college, as well as removing the 5 year period from initial enrollment in a public university where a student will be charged in-state tuition, so that Rosa can get a Bachelors.

Thank you very much for your time and for the opportunity to present testimony to you today.

Respectfully,

Manuel Mejia Gonzalez
Lane Community College