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March 24th, 2015

To: Senate Education Committee
From: Ricardo Lujan Valerio
RE: SB 932 Access to Opportunity

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

My name is Ricardo Lujan Valerio and I am a dual student at Southern Oregon University and Rogue Community College. I am a member of the Oregon Student Association and also an Oregon Action Board Member, a statewide community organization dedicated to social justice. I am here today to ask for your support Senate Bill 932 Access to Opportunity.

Being an undocumented student can make life difficult. College education has always been a priority to me. I have a sister that is five years older than me. When she graduated from high school, she was a valedictorian candidate. She was accepted into prestigious colleges in Southern California. Once it came time to enroll, she came across financial barriers. Due to our immigration status at that time, she was unable to get financial aid. She ended up attending two years of community college. After being forced to turn away due to financial hardship, I started to get worried about my own future. She encouraged me to never stop. Thanks to her, I am the first in my family to attend a university.

I have been fortunate enough to qualify for in-state tuition, but all of this could change for me in the future. Due to the high cost of higher education, I have not been able to afford the amount of credits necessary to graduate within the current policy's 5 year cutoff date. I am worried that I am only capable to fund my education on a term-basis, not knowing if I'll be able to afford next term's tuition.

In addition to this burden, I only qualify for a handful of scholarships, not because of my academic merit, but because I am not allowed to apply for any in-state financial aid. The amount of scholarship funding I receive does not cover the necessary expenses of a full-time student. I am currently a full-time employee at a not-profit law firm as an immigration paralegal and I still don't earn enough money to fully support myself. Being a full-time employee and a full-time student can drain you emotionally and physically. I fear that this financial burden will affect my performance in the classroom.

By amending the current policy and removing the 5 year cutoff date, I have the opportunity to continue my education, even if I cannot obtain my degree within the first 5 years. Secondly, the main reason we are having this hearing today is due to the lack of financial aid available to Tuition Equity eligible students, which is why I am asking that you support SB 932, Access to Opportunity. By making these changes, you will be



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able to give an opportunity towards an education to many students that hope to contribute to the economy of this great state that we call home. The future of our state depends on the education of our youth. You have the opportunity to give many future leaders a chance to fulfill their dreams.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this issue and for their time.

Sincerely,

Ricardo Lujan Valerio
Oregon Action
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