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April 6th, 2015

To: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education  
From: Christian Mello, Lane Community College  
RE: Community College Budget

Co-Chair Komp, Co-Chair Monroe, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christian Mello, and I am student at Lane Community College, as well as a member of the Oregon Student Association. I am here in support of increasing the budgets for Oregon's community colleges.

When I entered college in Fall 2008 my family was able to help pay for the first 2 terms of college, before I was able to navigate the maze of financial aid and the FAFSA. College was quite a bit more affordable at the time, as tuition was \$75.50 a credit. Money got tight, though, and family support had to be pulled back, so I was able to qualify for the Federal Pell Grant and the Oregon Opportunity Grant in the 2009-2010 academic year.

Due to some life issues I had at the time, including severe depression that trounced my grades and made it hard to get up in the morning, I needed to drop out from school for two years.

I wasn't able to come back to college until Fall 2012. Tuition by then had raised to \$90 a credit, and I was faced with quite a surprising new problem: financial aid wouldn't fund me to stay in community college. I was informed that based on my past records, the college projected that I wouldn't get my degree within my credit limit for the Pell Grant, so no financial aid. I was forced to work extremely hard to pay out of pocket for an entire year.

It took an extraordinary amount of work, but I found a way out of my perilous situation once I had achieved enough of a GPA to get it done: I dual-enrolled with Oregon State University. In doing this, Oregon State became my financial aid disbursement, and I was able to raise my credit limit to Bachelor's Degree level, ensuring that I would have a way to pay for school until I make the full transfer.

So, after all of this work, all of this struggle, what was the price I paid to make sure I would have a chance at making my life better? After some calculation, the rough amount I have spent on college, including tuition, books, and supplies, totals to \$24,616. Financial aid has covered a total of 59% of my college education. I was able to stay out of loans for a while by living in near poverty, and I'm sitting at a loan debt of \$3,375.



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Many other people aren't as lucky as I am to have found a way through and have had to leave school due to rising tuition and declining support from the state.

I urge to support a higher state budget allocation for community colleges in the upcoming budget, to the amount of \$550 million.

This spring, while I will be finally walking for my degree, I will be utterly enraged when I think of all of the people who won't be walking beside me because they couldn't afford to finish.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Christian Mello

Lane Community College