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May 7th, 2015

To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Melinda Joy
RE: HB 3308, Cultural Competency

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

My name is Melinda Joy, and I'm from Coos Bay and a student at Portland State University. I am here to testify in support of HB 3308. I am the youngest of seven children and I, like all of my siblings before me, began life solely dependent on various extended family members' generosity. Eventually I too was placed in the foster care system. After I was released as ward of the state at age 16 I was on my own. I made sure to complete my GED and although I had no family to support me or the resources to afford it I somehow made it to community college. As a 1st generation college student with a disability I can share with you my difficulties in attaining my education.

In 2007 I began my first year at Southwestern Oregon Community College. To be honest I barely remember what classes I took; my first term I worked the graveyard shift at a local residential treatment center for girls, so I could afford to live in the dorms. Working to pay for school while balancing school was difficult, I found myself searching for anything that could fit my schedule. I bartended, waited tables and I even spent some time working as a medical bill collector. I explored the world college had to offer until I finished my prerequisites and Graduated with an Associates of Arts degree in 2011 with \$23,044 of debt.

That summer I was accepted into Pacific University's School of Dental Health Science. As one of the most prestigious dental hygiene programs in the North West, I scraped together whatever money I could to pay for the cost of attending a private university. While at Pacific I encountered my first real struggles with explaining the difficulties I faced with my disability. The Resource Center for students with Disabilities was on another campus in a different city and because of the compartmentalization no one in my program knew anything about it or what services they could offer.

After completing the requirements to be approved for accommodations by the DRC I was surprised to find that my program was resistant to and had difficulties with even the simplest of requests such as a note taker. After a car accident necessitated new accommodations while I recovered, my program refused to accommodate me until I had received approval from yet another administrator on a different campus. By the time I had received it, it was too late to salvage my grades. In a competitive environment where 79% is failure, I was pushed out because I had the inconvenience of experiencing an accident. They assured me that I could simply reapply as soon as my



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physical therapy was complete, after a semester off I reapplied and was denied. Being disabled meant that I, in their eyes, was incapable of becoming a dental hygienist in their program. \$62,577

It's important to understand that earning my college degree was my one and only shot. I had managed to get to college but doing so was a huge risk I took knowing that I had no safety net. Please understand that being me is inherently more expensive, and requires considerably more effort than my peers. People of marginalized communities struggle with not only the everyday concerns of life but also with the penalties of their marginalization. Undeterred, I researched other ways to utilize my education, and eventually transferred to Portland State's School of Community Health. The DRC there is arguably better than what I experienced but even at Portland State I struggle with the stigma's associated with my disability, as if that, somehow, makes me less deserving of an education. In spite of the struggles, today, I am proud to say that I am graduating this year with a B.S. double majoring in Health Science and Community Health Education. \$26,601

For a total of One-Hundred-Twelve-Thousand-Two-Hundred-and-Twenty-Two dollars, plus my costs for this semester. That's what it has costs me to go to school. The average student debt in Oregon is somewhere around \$25,000. If you solve the problems of the average student in Oregon you still leave me with more than \$75,000 of other problems to deal with. Helping marginalized communities will never happen if we don't build equity. If marginalized people don't have a voice we can't even begin to do that. HB 3308 gives people like me a voice so that one day receiving an education will depend on nothing more than the will and determination of the individual to complete their studies.

Our professors and staff need these continuing education resources in order to better support all students on our campuses. I believe HB 3308 is a solid solution in the right direction.

Please support HB 3308.