

Hello, from a fellow constituent to the state:

My name is Kevin Figueroa - a first generation, third year, low income student at Western Oregon University. I'm a Secondary Education major and I've loved the opportunities Western has given me these past years. For almost two years now, I've been renting an apartment close to my campus and working a mix-match of jobs. My small, standard, college student home is equipped with essential utilities and convenient access to my university. While I have been able to find work in both Monmouth and Salem during my college career, there has been little to no employment in the area. Making living costs and personal spending very tight and sometimes hard to manage.

Ever since COVID-19 has caused every life in Oregon, the United States, and the entire globe to change drastically in a moment's notice. My own personal life shifted significantly, I've witnessed my friend's universities and even my own institution close its doors, forcing all courses to now move online for the foreseeable future. Businesses within the area can no longer hire and many had to shut their doors, leaving hundreds, if not thousands of college students without a job. All the students and families who were affected now must face hardships of the unknown. They potentially must face extreme tight budgeting to attempt to pay rent while being unemployed. Struggle to learn how their education will continue in circumstances they never expected or wanted to be in. These students invested into a brick and mortar education with daily interactions with peers and professors, being able to learn material hands on. Now we must take a new course of action, which will be extremely difficult and cause countless extra hardships.

The effects this virus is having on our society is monumental, forcing all of us to alter our daily lives and take extra precautions for our health. One of the big concerns that must be acknowledged within our own state is the underrepresented groups in higher education. I personally have suffered from a recent car accident and my immune system has been weakened from medications. I, recently, can no longer attempt to participate in society for my own safety. On top of my self isolation, learning in higher education is now a personal struggle as online courses do not teach all students the same as most, if not all. Many educators and other students will agree with this statement.

I kindly and ever so pressingly request for you to include protections in all ways students of higher education and their families need in this uncertain time. To simply name a few: no late fees or renters evictions; no utility late fees or shut-offs; access to technology (computers, WiFi); college budgeting emergency funds for students in crisis; no added online class fees; protection for work study students. This aid will allow residents throughout all of Oregon to feel relief from this pandemic when it is so desperately needed.

Sincerely,

Kevin Figueroa