

TO CHAIR WAGNER AND THE MEMBERS OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
FROM: Diane Winn, Member of the American Association of University Women of Oregon
RE: Support for Senate Bill 794

I am writing this in support of Senate Bill 794.

One of our recent monthly programs addressed the issue of student parents and another the issue of student debt for women. One of the overarching factors that were critical in both programs was the challenge faced by female students who were parents. They not only had more expenses, often related to expensive child care, and therefore had difficulty paying for and staying in school.

We heard that a significant number of women attending our public colleges and community colleges today do so while also caring for dependent children. Unfortunately, Oregon doesn't track how many of our students find themselves in this situation. We can't determine whether student parents graduate at the same or different rates. We don't know whether student parents drop out at the same or different rates as students without children, take longer to obtain a degree or feel they must limit their career aspirations.

National data show that 53% of student parents will not complete a degree. Only 28% of single mothers graduate with a degree or certificate within 6 years of enrollment and another 55 percent leave school before earning any college credential at all. Low-income college students with children are 25% less likely to obtain a degree than low-income adults without children.

Supporting students with children is a critical component of promoting racial and ethnic equity in education, as rates of parenthood vary substantially by race and ethnicity. Among African American female undergraduates nationwide, for example, 47 percent are raising dependent children while in school.

The bottom line —A college education provides dignity to the student and a way up and out of economically fragile situations. However, the impact of a college education extends far beyond the student parent. Parents who complete or are obtaining a college degree serve as essential role models for their children, and their educational success reaches to the second and third generations. They also become income generating citizens of Oregon's economy.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 794.

Respectfully,

Diane Winn
Portland, Oregon