

April 10, 2019

Co-Chair Roblan, Co-Chair Smith Warner, Co-Vice Chair Knopp, Co-Vice Chair Smith and
Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success

Subject: Don't Leave College Students Behind in New Education Funding

Legislators have a once-in-decade opportunity to invest in Oregon students and reform Oregon's tax system, but the current plan laid out in House Bill 2019 leaves college students behind.

By 2020, 65 percent of new jobs are expected to require education and training beyond high school. To provide Oregonians the opportunity they need to thrive and for businesses to help grow the economy, we need to support students from cradle to career. Since Measure 5, Oregon students have seen tuition increases vastly outpace inflation while programs and services have been cut because state investment fell further behind. Student debt is higher than it's ever been.

My mom and I ended up being evicted from our home before I started high school. We were the only people of color left on the block. One by one I watched as black neighbors, businesses, and culture were replaced and erased. It was bound to happen to us, like a ticking time bomb. We were off Williams and Graham Street, in the heart of Northeast Portland, and I watched my neighborhood disintegrate in the name of restoration and progression.

Since that first eviction we have struggled to have stable housing the last four years. Losing my home not just once but four more times has taught me resilience. I was raised by a young, single mother so I have had to learn how to be self-sufficient. I've managed to hold a steady job since eighth grade and there have been many times I had to help my mom out financially.

I wouldn't be the motivated and independent woman I am today without going through those struggles. Deciding to become a social worker came naturally to me, because I want to be a voice for those that don't feel they have one. Community colleges help students like me access higher education, benefiting both students and the surrounding community.

I urge you to support Governor Kate Brown's call for including post-secondary education in the spending proposal before this committee.

Lillian Gee