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Joint Committee on Student Success House Bill 2019  
5:00 PM | Hearing Room F

Dear members of the Joint Committee on Student Success,

My name is Carol Moreno and I am here today to advocate for increased funding to students in higher education. It is my last year at Oregon State University, and as someone that works in student government- I have heard many concerns from students from a variety of different backgrounds about their ability to continue their education while maintaining their mental wellbeing.

This last week, the Joint Committee on Student Success released its funding proposal that issued a plan for the \$2 billion that it would receive from the commercial activities tax. This proposal did not provide any funding to support students attending Oregon's community colleges or universities.

In the last two weeks, the Oregon State University Board of Trustees voted to increase tuition by 4.29%, which will more than likely be one of the lowest increases among public universities in Oregon. OSU has committed to provide 12% of the tuition increase towards tuition waivers for low-income students.

As a Pell grant and Oregon Opportunity grant recipient, I can attest to how helpful these tuition waivers have been to me over the last couple of years. If it was not for the financial assistance that I have had the privilege of receiving, I would not have been able to continue my education at Oregon State University. Throughout my 4 years at OSU, I have continuously worked two jobs to afford the cost of rent, food, textbooks, utilities, and medical expenses. Corvallis has also been in the midst of a housing crisis and the average cost of rent for college students ranges from \$600-1,200 a month.

There are many unique challenges that students face, for example, throughout my time in college I have provided financial assistance to my family on 6 different occasions. I know that I am not the only student that has faced this kind of challenge. There are students that receive little to no financial aid because their families fall under a higher income bracket, but for one reason or another their parents have decided not to provide them any financial assistance.

In the last few years, funding for the Oregon Opportunity grant has continued to decrease. Oregon provides less funding per student than its neighboring states, Washington and California. The Higher Education Coordinating Committee reported that in 2017, the graduation rate for the 39% of students who reported being first-generation college students was 47%. I will be part of that statistic when I graduate in June. About 40% of students are eligible for the Oregon Opportunity grant, but only 36% of students receive public grant aid. 51% of students reported not being able to meet expenses while pursuing their degree in Oregon.

As a student that grew up in a small rural community, I understand the importance of providing funding to K-12 education. I also acknowledge that college isn't for everyone and that support towards trade schools is also needed. But I am asking the Student Success Committee not leave university and community college students behind in this funding proposal. OSU provides \$50 million in direct student support through financial aid and scholarships. Low-income students at OSU only receive \$9.3 million in

financial assistance from the state of Oregon in the form of Oregon Opportunity grants. The physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of many students is suffering. Higher education is not a luxury, but an opportunity for many students- especially low-income students of color- to rise out of poverty. Now is the time to act. Please support student financial aid, like the Oregon Opportunity Grant in the Student Success proposal.

Thank You for your time,

Carol Moreno