

**Written Testimony on House Bill 4099**  
**February 3, 2020**

Good afternoon Chair Representative Margaret Doherty, Vice Chair Representative Teresa Alonso Leon, Vice Chair, Representative Cheri Helt and members of the House Committee on Education:

My name is Bennie Moses-Mesubed, the Vice President for COFA Alliance National Network of Oregon as well as the Vice Chair for the Oregon Commission on Asian Pacific Islander Affairs. I am also the Student Diversity & Inclusion Director at Eastern Oregon University and a COFA islander descent residing in La Grande, Oregon in Union County.

I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 4099, a tuition equity bill that will grant in-state tuition to COFA students in Oregon.

The Compact of Free Association agreement between the United States and the Republic of Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia is a unique agreement that was established after 1986. It also allows the United States to have a strong military presence in the COFA islands in perpetuity.

Within the Compact agreements, citizens from each of these nations have special immigration privileges where they can work, study and reside in the United States in a nonimmigrant status, without a US visa and have an indefinite length of stay.

There are about 25 COFA students that come to attend EOU each year. Due to the income disparities, and financial challenges, over 90% of the students work 25 to 40 hours per week, maintain a full credit load and are active in campus involvement include leading organizations and Student Government.

Due to the unique relationships COFA nations have with the US, the profile of students is very different. I would like to share 2 different COFA students' profile.

One is a young Micronesian woman, majoring in Sociology and is a recent graduate. She is a US citizen, a full-time student working 2 jobs; she was active in leadership programs; and has coordinated events like the annual diversity and equity conference on campus, been involved with the Governor's Food Drive, and the Walk for Warmth, which is a fundraising effort to help people in Union County who may not be able to pay for heating during the winter months.

The other is our COFA veteran, who recently completed 4 years serving in the US Military and has started his college career majoring in Political Science. He works part-time to support his family and his wife is also a full-time student. He is one of 5 COFA veterans who are full time students and are active in the military.

Out of 104 enrolled EOU students, over 70 of them work a minimum of 30 hours off campus. COFA student residents all pay non-resident tuition rates and struggle completing a full year of studies, because of financial challenges. They still pay all Oregon taxes -- Local, State as well as federal taxes.

Even though their taxes help pay for the programs that assist low-income families, COFA residents are not able to access these services themselves. What this bill will provide is an opportunity for these students to immediately enroll in any Oregon public college or university and pay in-state rates, making it feasible for them to attain a college degree.

As an active member of my community and state, I interact with many COFA people living in Oregon and in Union County. In La Grande, over 75 families have settled in the community and

are active in community organizations, churches as well as work in different sectors – for profit, non-profit, non-government as well as government agencies. Many more of them are all over the state, contributing to the economies of communities in Oregon.

Educational attainment provides the students the opportunity to develop skills and acquire the needed credentials to enter into the workforce in order to provide an adequate livelihood for themselves and their families.

Most COFA students in Oregon universities now, have family incomes so low and at poverty level, and a college attainment is an unattainable goal. However, this bill could realistically provide an opportunity for a dozen or more COFA students the ability to enroll in an Oregon college or university and fulfill that goal.

I believe that it is in Oregon's interest to provide access to higher education for all people especially underserved communities that have been left behind in the development of accessible and affordable educational opportunities.

Again, thank you for your time and please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.