

## Written Testimony on House Bill 4099

Good afternoon members of the Oregon Legislature and Sponsors of the House Bill 4099:

I want to thank you all for this tremendous opportunity to have my voice heard here today. My name is Tyana Musrasrik and I am from the island of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia, a 'freely associated state' with the United States of America. I am a recent graduate of Eastern Oregon University residing in La Grande, Oregon. I also work as the Advocacy Support Coordinator and Crisis Response Advocate for our local Shelter from the Storm in La Grande, Union County.

My testimony today is in support of HB 4099, a tuition equity bill that will grant in-state tuition to COFA students in Oregon. This is just one step towards creating an equitable and sustainable future for the COFA citizens contributing to the American economy and labor force, while in college and afterwards.

As mentioned in the backstory of how COFA islanders came to be in this country, we can see how the United States of America has had quite an unique relationship with the Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, and Republic of the Marshall Islands, formerly known as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. It was through this relationship between our countries that we have all seen and witnessed an influx of COFA islanders to the United States of America. Since then, COFA islanders have contributed immensely to this country-- it's military, labor force, and its economy--paying local, state, and federal taxes whilst facing systemic and institutional barriers. COFA islanders do not have access to public services such as healthcare, welfare, housing, and other like resources.

I believe it is the goal for many of us to create a more inclusive and equitable system and country for all. One way we can do that is by removing some of the barriers COFA islanders face when trying to attain a postsecondary education in the United States of America.

Just a little bit about my own personal journey-- In the summer of 2016, I had moved to La Grande, Oregon having just graduated with an associate's degree from the College of Micronesia. In the hopes of getting a higher degree and a well-paying job, I had no choice but to make the 6,000-mile journey across the Pacific Ocean. I attended Eastern Oregon University, following in the footsteps of many family and community members who all turned out to be successful leaders and entrepreneurs of the country.

Here I am nearly 3 years later having graduated from Eastern Oregon University with a bachelor's degree in Anthropology and Sociology. This does not go without saying this journey didn't come with its fair share of struggles. Moving to the US is very costly and is a life investment for most parents and families sending their children to get an education. I worked two jobs, was actively involved in student leadership and organizations and taking the maximum 21 credit load. I volunteer on and off campus including attending EOU's annual lobby day at the capitol where we advocated for support for our rural institution; a place where COFA students thrive because of the common rural experience as well as community support programs like Walk for Warmth to fundraise for money to help those that cannot afford heat during winter time in Union County. I managed to graduate magna cum laude with the ideal job in the social work field lined up just prior to graduation. You see, I came here with a dream - a mission -- and a purpose. I did not have the choice to dilly dally and take my time contemplating what I wanted to do having a village of people waiting on me and rooting for me. I am the first of 29 grandchildren to graduate with a Bachelor's degree. I am their role model and am setting a precedent.

Here I am now asking you to make it a little easier on those who come after me. On those who will come to the United States of America seeking a better education, a better life and a future. By passing this bill, you will allow COFA islanders to receive in-state resident tuition thereby lessening tuition and enrollment costs and fees. By doing so, you are giving COFA islanders a fair fighting chance to attaining a higher education and a chance to bettering their lives.

As a US citizen of COFA Micronesian descent, Oregon voter and a constituent, I am humbly asking for your support in passing the HB4099. I thank you for your time and ask that you support this bill.