



Carla C. Piluso
State Representative, House District 50
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February 25th, 2020

RE: HB 4160

Chair Wagner and members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Carla Piluso and I proudly represent House District 50, the great city of Gresham. I am submitting this testimony to show my proud support for HB 4160, the Student Voice Bill, which Establishes a Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education.

In the city of Gresham, where the majority of my constituents live, many people from underrepresented communities do not complete higher education at the same rate as their counterparts. According to the Census, an average of 23% of white people from Gresham complete higher education, but only 10% of my constituents that are Black or Latinx complete higher education. This disparity must be corrected.

This task force would look at the experiences of many underrepresented communities in higher education, including students of color, students from rural communities, students from low income families, students with disabilities, students with mental health issues, students within the LGBTQ+ community, student parents, non-traditional students, students who are foster children, and students who earned a diploma by completing a high school equivalency test such as the GED. By developing this task force, legislators will be able to hear the experiences of underrepresented students pursuing higher education and make informed decisions when crafting policy that would ultimately better the experience of underrepresented students.

Students from underrepresented communities experience unique hurdles when accessing higher education, and one of these many hurdles include a lack of opportunity to build large communities with their peers. These students are less likely to see instructors and peers who share their identities, thus limiting the opportunity for shared experiences among these communities. Without a strong community and support system, the pressures of higher education can be unfeasible.

At the University of Oregon, the current overall graduation rate of students in four years is 52.7%. However, for students from underrepresented communities, the rate drops to 45.4%. This statistic shows that there are clearly barriers for students from these communities when completing higher education, and that the state must take action to ensure that these communities have the tools they need to succeed.

I see this process as an opportunity to meaningfully incorporate the voices of those most affected by these issues: underrepresented students in higher education, to ensure the state legislature is adequately supporting their educational experience.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I urge you to support House Bill 4099.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Carla Piluso", written in a cursive style.

Carla C. Piluso
Oregon State Representative, House District 50