

Dear Members of the Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education:

My name is Francis Alicia Rojina and I am from Malin, Oregon. I am the Student Inclusion and Success Coordinator for the OHSU School of Nursing on the Klamath Falls campus. As a first-generation Mexican American of a low-income background from rural Oregon, I was an underrepresented student, struggling to succeed throughout my educational pathway. I was an underrepresented student that relied on the food pantry and events with free food because food insecurity was my reality. Housing insecurity was my reality. I couldn't afford my co-pay for necessary medical appointments and treatments. I didn't know how to best navigate resources— or they were non-existent. And I struggled academically. My grades dropped, I even failed classes. And that had consequences for how I moved forward as a student to achieve my dreams. But I succeeded more times than I've failed.

These experiences are not unique to me, I've witnessed our underrepresented nursing students struggle through similar challenges that have consequently altered their success in our program. And while my personal and professional experiences have equipped me with tools and strategies to support our students, my OHSU team and I can't do this work on our own. We need your help. We need additional funding opportunities to like the one that was awarded by the Health Resources and Services Administration to fund our program, Advancing Health Equity through Student Empowerment & Professional Success (HealthE STEPS), which seeks to attract and advance a diverse nursing student body within the Oregon public education system, from pre-nursing through graduate education. Unfortunately, we were not funded for the 2021-2022 academic year which meant that we could not provide scholarships to our underrepresented nursing students in need of additional financial assistance.

I turn to you, members of the legislature and ask that you REALLY hear us during your listening sessions and intently read our written testimonies to inform future student policy and funding proposals. Use your tools and your power to help build a more equitable pathway to success, for underrepresented students in higher education. I will soon be a student again, as I prepare to apply to medical school, and I look forward to seeing how your legislative decisions will positively impact current and future student pathway experiences.

I applaud your initiative to make space to listen and learn from the lived experiences of underrepresented people in higher education. Because slowly, many of us that identify as underrepresented are carving and chipping away at the obstacles that have historically marginalized us... Because we've lived through them. We can identify and remove these barriers before someone's else's trajectory is hindered or halted. And standing next to us, chipping away at those barriers are the people that believed in our capability to move forward and picked up their own tools and utilized their power to level the pathway. Together we are paving a clearer pathway to be represented in spaces like higher education, spaces like hospitals and clinics, spaces like the Oregon legislature.

You never know, you may be laying the steady steppingstones for our future healthcare workforce that will provide care for you or your loved ones.

I appreciate the opportunity to disclose my testimony.

Gratefully,

Francis Rojina

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