



Office of the Dean of Students

February 17, 2021

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members:

Thank you for taking time to hear and read testimony regarding the impacts of the 2020 fires in Southern Oregon. As the Dean of Students at Southern Oregon University, my team and I have spent the last five months working with more than one hundred students who have been directly impacted by the fires. Half of the students that we have assisted lost their homes or lost their intended rental just before the start of our fall term. We know that there were many more impacted students at SOU than those that we have been alerted to through our SOU Cares reporting system. We have been very successful in assisting some of our students in persisting through fall and winter terms, while others have withdrawn from one or both terms. I would love to share every story with you but I know that each of you already have a firm grasp on the individual stories of loss and resilience. I want to share a couple of brief snapshots so you have a sense of the scenarios that we are working through with the our fire impacted students.

Laura is a 23 year old Junior who was to be a new transfer student to SOU and planned to start in the fall of 2020. She and her family lost their home in the Almeda fire and she had to withdraw from SOU due to the family's financial concerns. Laura had to put her dreams on hold and we want to assist her as soon as she and her family are ready for her to return. Meghan is a 48 year old Senior who lost her home in the Almeda fire. She has persisted with support from SOU support services and her faculty, including technology assistance so that she could engage in her courses. Meghan has been very successful despite the extraordinary hardships and we look forward to celebrating her upcoming graduation. Ralph is a 33 year old man who was displaced by the Almeda fire and had to stop out for fall and winter terms. He is now ready to return to SOU for spring 2021 and we look forward to supporting him while he completes his education.

The SOU Student Support Network continues to try to assist each of the impacted students, those that we have retained and those that needed to stop out of their educational dreams at least for the time being. Given the enormity of the fire-impacts to individuals and families, it is no surprise that the downstream impacts would reach higher education. SOU continues to be vital to the educational, economic, and fire-recovery efforts of this region. We know that the institutional financial impacts are greater than a million dollars in tuition and fees. I ask that you approve financial assistance such that SOU be held harmless for the enrollment reductions that are directly related to the 2020 fires. Thank you for your work on behalf of all of us.

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Dean of Students