



March 18, 2021

Oregon House Education Committee  
900 Court Street, NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 2412, -2 Amendments

Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the House Education Committee,

I'm writing you today to urge your support and adoption of the -2 amendments to HB 2412. This amendment includes funding for five different college access programs that were funded in the Governors Recommend Budget. These five programs provide valuable access and supports for first generation, low-income, and historically underserved students. Today, I would like to especially focus on the Oregon TRIO Association (OTA) as I have more to offer on this innovative.

Even though the Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) uses federal grants that are designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, the funds are mainly spent on the staff for labor and benefits, while the remaining go either directly or indirectly to students. For example, college TRIO programs could only spend federal grant aid on one or two GRE exams out of a program that usually supports close to 200 students. Our program here at Southern Oregon University (SOU) is limited by its ability to do more which is why organizations like the OTA are vital in collaborating and streamlining with other TRIO programs in best practices when serving our students.

From the perspective of OTA, the board members are comprised on volunteers and the funding are generated by donations which is again very limited and hardest hit from the recent pandemic. The funds under the -2 amendments would make OTA more centralized; hire a small staff of professionals and offer more access for students in the state to participate in internships, give additional funding to students who are in their 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> year and have run out of aid, and create more TRIO projects by offering peer review workshops just to name a few. The possible outcomes from this investment will give more students access to TRIO programs, improve high school and college graduation rates, increase retention rates, and give our students a better outcome.



College is more important, but more expensive than before. However, cost and debts are only part of the story. The greatest need is the increasing focus on student success. First-generation, low-income college students, and minority students, in particular, are being underserved by the current system. Just 9% of students from the lowest income quartile graduate with a bachelor's degree by age 24, compared to 77 percent for the top income quartile (Department of Education, 2021). Students from low-income families are also less likely to enroll in and complete college than their peers (Department of Education, 2021).

As a former TRIO student, and now TRIO advisor, I know firsthand that TRIO works and that every dollar spent goes to help so many first generation, low-income, and minority students. However, if you are still not persuaded by my letter, I encourage you to read the several of many student success stories on our OTA website:

<https://oregontrio.org/>

Respectfully,

*Christopher Mahan*

Christopher Mahan

*OTA Alumni Representative  
2019-2020 Student Leadership Conference Chair  
Southern Oregon University TRIO SSS Academic Advisor  
Housing & Human Services Commissioner for Ashland Oregon  
Former TRIO SSS student*