



SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

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Dear Chair Teresa Alonso Leon and Members of the House Education Committee,

I am a Professor and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Training in Biomedical Research at Portland State University. I am also the Principal Investigator of BUILD EXITO. Enhancing Cross-disciplinary Infrastructure and Training at Oregon or EXITO, is a partnership that includes the Oregon Health and Science University, Portland Community College, Clackamas Community College and other institutions of higher education in the region that have now served more than 500 students.

BUILD EXITO was first established as a research experiment funded by the federal government to understand how students with disabilities, students impacted by the foster care system, and other underrepresented students can be successful in seeking a biomedical degree. The goal of EXITO is to diversify the biomedical research workforce. More recently we have further witnessed the devastating effect that COVID-19 has had among underserved populations in the State of Oregon, and the impact of not having a biomedical workforce that resembles the demographic of the state.

We have learned that underserved students who are given an equitable opportunity at higher education can be successful at completing their degrees and applying to graduate school. Our results show EXITO scholars have significantly better retention and graduation rates, and Grade Point Average (GPA) when compared with the general population of students in similar degrees. EXITO scholars are attending graduate school in Harvard, John Hopkins, UC Berkeley, OHSU and other prestigious universities.

I'm writing today to urge your support and adoption of the amendment 2 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 low-income and historically underserved students and help them to achieve their post-secondary goals. Specifically, HB 2412 will make it possible for BUILD EXITO to scale up our program to increase the number of underrepresented students seeking biomedical careers and to enhance the infrastructure of BUILD EXITO to collaborate with more organizations.

Yours for Health,

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