

**To: Oregon Senate Committee on Education, Chair Michael Dembrow,
Vice-Chair Senator Chuck Thomsen, Members of the Committee**

From: Joyah Wong

Subject: This testimony is presented in support of SB 553

Date: February 8, 2021

My name is Joyah Wong and I am a Senior Sociology/Anthropology major attending classes at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, Oregon. In August of 2019, I transferred over from Palau Community College in the Republic of Palau, one of the three COFA island nations in the Western Pacific. All was well but the only limitation I faced was the tuition cost. I had planned out a budget and my only means of tuition funding were FAFSA.

The very first time I struggled to pay tuition was in Fall 2019. I was not financially prepared to have tuition AND fees (room & board) be quite as high as they were. I felt overwhelmed because I knew that FAFSA funding would not be enough, but that was only brought to my attention after I had already arrived on campus.

Fortunately, during my first term, I was able to get two part time jobs which helped me pay down the outstanding balance that placed holds and prevented me from registering for classes. Attending full-time classes and working two jobs, having to pay for rent, utilities, and groceries plus out-of-state tuition was and will continue to be a struggle. My two jobs took a lot of time and attention away from being a student. My overall financial experience has been quite worrisome especially because as a COFA student, I am ineligible to apply for other financial support including student loans.

That is why I support and am requesting that you all support Senate Bill 553 to allow those like me who enter the United States under the Compact of Free Association treaty to qualify for exemption from nonresident tuition and fees at public universities in Oregon. By passing SB 553, you are giving all current and future COFA students the chance of getting a higher education degree and lessening the financial burden and barriers that have prevented us from graduating college.

I thank you for your time and hope that you consider supporting this bill.

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