

April 16, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner-Hayward, Rayfield and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kendra Santiago and I live in Klamath Falls, where I work as a project manager for Klamath County Economic Development Association (KCEDA). My work and personal passions put me in a position to have an interest in success of higher education and its impact on the development of rural Oregon's economic landscape. I am also a graduate of Oregon Institute of Technology. I respectfully request that you support robust investments in public higher education, including funding the Public University Support Fund at \$900 million, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant at \$200 million.

Scholarships and grants were extremely important to me to assist me in my degree attainment, which has led to a fulfilling career. Because of the access I had to an education at Oregon Institute of Technology, my family and I have a great quality of life and a nice standard of living. By minimizing the debt that students take on, you are supporting the development of a skilled workforce with a greater purchasing power, leading to a stable and healthy economy.

Both the Public University Support Fund and the Oregon Opportunity Grant are critical pieces contributing to future success for graduates and economic vitality for Oregon. Funding for Oregon's public universities creates opportunities for all Oregon students, and it is more critical now than ever. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities for BIPOC, lower-income, and rural students. It is crucial that colleges and universities have adequate resources to address these disparities and ensure that all students have access to opportunity.

One of our significant opportunities in the local community is to build up our regional workforce as a key factor in strengthening and diversifying our economy. This requires the intentional development of a highly skilled, home-grown workforce, educated, trained, and retained across the region. Oregon Tech University is a strategic partner in fulfilling our economic development goals.

Thank you for serving our community. I know you will be forced to make tough budget decisions this session, and I hope you will prioritize funding for public education. The willingness of policymakers to commit resources to protect the state's fragile cradle-to-career public education system may determine whether the impact of COVID-19 is measured in years or in generations.

Sincerely,



Kendra Santiago

Project Manager, KCEDA / Choose Klamath ~ It's Just Better Here!