

Good afternoon co-chairs and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Michael Tornatta, I'm a student from OSU-Cascades in Bend and I'm the Student Inclusion Coordinator for the Associated Students of Cascades Campus.

I am here to ask you to support the funding for HB 2590, HB 2835, Oregon Opportunity Grant funding of \$290M, Public University Support funding of \$900M, and the Community College Support funding of \$702M.

As a student, I believe that college should be an affordable experience and should be as accessible to as many people as possible. HB 2590 takes a great step in the right direction for making Oregon higher education more inclusive. And as a student who is SNAP eligible, HB 2835 is something I especially support. There are so many resources for students to have to navigate through and oftentimes, in my experience, you can lose out on some assistance that you might otherwise be eligible for simply because you didn't know it was available. Having a benefits navigator would have been amazing for me when I was navigating those resources and could have saved me a lot of time and stress when trying to understand what benefits I was eligible for. I believe that this would greatly benefit future students and would also serve to increase accessibility to higher education for many people.

Then when it comes to higher education funding, with the support funds and opportunity grant, in addition to the support it would provide to students and faculty, I also view that as a way to prevent another increase to tuition costs. As a student leader at OSU-Cascades, I have heard from an alarming amount of students that if tuition were to increase any further they would either need to leave higher ed or would have to seriously consider if they could afford to stay in higher ed. Many of my friends and colleagues have needed to space out the time it has taken for them to get their degree so that they can work and save in order to afford the tuition costs. All the while many are dealing with housing and food insecurity and are struggling to get by all for trying to make a better future for themselves. I have had to take years away from school in the past to work full time and save just to afford tuition and that is in addition to me having federal loans and grants. It should not be that difficult to achieve an education and further hikes in tuition rates would only serve to lock more and more people out of high education.

Please remember my story when you vote on these, and please support the funding for HB 2590, HB 2835, Oregon Opportunity Grant, Public University support Fund, and the Community College Support fund.

Thank you for your time,

Michael Tornatta