

April 20, 2021

Joint Ways and Means Committee
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 2412A – Funding for ASPIRE, AVID, BUILD EXITO, CollegePossible & TRiO

Chair Co-Chair Betsy Johnson, Co-Chair Dan Rayfield, and Co-Chair Elizabeth Steiner Hayway.

My name is Tamam Waritu, and I am a former Oregon TRiO Student as well as a participant of the Oregon TRiO Association Student Leadership Conference. I am writing to you to inform you that this program has had a profound impact on my life and the lives of so many other first-generation and low-income TRiO students in our state. Each year, the conference brings together hundreds of TRiO students, staff, as well as speakers and workshop presenters to inspire, inform and equip students with leadership skills, learn more about college/career, and create a lifelong friendship. All in all, it is a day that the first generation/low-income TRiO students often look forward to each year.

On a personal level, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the TRiO program and the staff members. As someone who comes from a family with no formal education (my mother never went to school and my father has only a fourth-grade level of education) and grew up in a low-income government housing on a food stamps, I did not have the adequate support at home, so I had to rely on programs like the TRiO, including the conferences, to learn more about college and career. Thanks to the exposure and the support I have received from these programs, today I consider myself a successful person living the American dream.

I hold a Master's degree from Harvard and a Bachelor degree from Portland State University. I am a public speaker and a leadership trainer, where I have impacted the lives of tens of thousands of students, particularly those whom I once resembled--the first-generation and low-income students--in over 35 states. None of this would have been possible if it were not for this program and the amazing staff members that encouraged and supported me throughout my academic journey, some of whom I consider a great friend and a valuable mentor till this day.

So, as you can see, the TRiO program and the leadership conference is a vital resource to the TRiO first-generation and low-income students in the state of Oregon. On behalf of the Oregon TRiO students, staff, and alumni, I ask you to stand by this program and provide the funding it needs in order to continue to make an impact on the lives of those students who need it the most. Remember, the seed you plant does indeed flourish.

Sincerely,