

Hello to the Ways and Means Committee Committee,

My name is Toni Lewis, and I am a student at Portland State University majoring in Speech and Hearing Sciences and minoring in Spanish.

I am asking you to fully fund the Benefits Navigator Position within HB 2835. This bill helps address the food and housing insecurity crisis among students at our colleges and universities.

In Oregon, we know that in 2020, about 41% of students were food insecure. Food and housing insecurity impact our ability to succeed in school and graduate on time.

My experience with food and housing insecurity as a full-time student has been mentally and physically taxing. I have had to rely on weekly visits to the campus food pantry and the monthly free food fair to keep my pantry stocked. Fortunately, I save on laundry expenses by doing the wash at a friend's every weekend. I have faced uncertainty about the affordability of campus housing during the summer term. It is essential to know that this impacts my education. I am a full-time student and a part-time employee, yet I can barely afford to pay for monthly expenses, like food and bills. I am often distracted in class by financial concerns; the physical toll of stress manifests itself through lost sleep and a persistent eye twitch.

As an undergraduate, I am aware of the impact of good grades and volunteer history on grad school applications. If I am to have a fighting chance, I know I have to balance work, school, and extra-curricular activities, as well as personal and mental care. This balancing act places a considerable burden on students, especially those living far from home or without a safety net. The challenge of managing these elements has influenced my decision to delay education since graduating from high school over a decade ago. I am working tirelessly to ensure I am not further delayed in graduating and becoming a bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist.

My highest priority is to serve my community and enable others to succeed. Please remember my story when you are setting the budget, and please fully fund HB 2835.

Thank you,

Toni Lewis