

FROM THE DESK OF  
Marcia L. Aaron

Oregon State Legislature  
Joint Committee on Ways & Means  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301  
Via Email Only

April 21, 2021

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

The demands on your time, attention, and budgetary resources are likely many. I write today respecting those demands and with gratitude for your willingness to serve Oregonians through your work. I also write today with some urgency and a call to action in support of public higher education in Oregon.

Oregon's public universities have collectively requested funding of \$900 million for the Public University Support Fund (PUSF) and \$200 million for the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) program, both of which are vital to the success of the students we serve.

As a trustee for the University of Oregon (UO), I am able to spend a great deal of time connecting with and hearing from students, whether in small group settings or through the public comment they offer.

Many of their stories resonate with me: I grew up in a very small town in southern Oregon and attended the UO through a combination of grants, loans, scholarships, and work as a student. A college degree, let alone one at an excellent national university, was not in the cards for many of my classmates. I credit my education—my *public* higher education—as the foundation that allowed me to reach success in two very different careers (the first in finance and the second in public K-8 education). I am passionate about ensuring that today's low- and middle-income Oregonians have that same opportunity.

Programs like the OOG allow tens of thousands of such students to realize a college degree, but demand outpaces available resources. The OOG program is a simple way to directly help students who might otherwise not be able to afford college.

Our universities are admitting more first generation students, more students of color, and more low-income students than ever before. This is terrific news, but we cannot end the conversation with admittance and financial aid. We must also invest in the success of our students through top-notch education, modern academic offerings, research and scholarship opportunities, and support services designed to help today's college students. That is where the PUSF comes in. A modest increase to the PUSF, particularly during a time when institutions are recovering from multi-year pandemic-related effects, can go a long way to managing tuition and protecting critical services.

Increases in funding for the PUSF and OOG are not just greater expenditures of money, they are investments in Oregon's future—a future with fewer access or achievement disparities amongst the population, a future where universities continue to play a vital role in solving local and global problems, and a future where generations of graduates can reflect on the life-changing opportunity they were given.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marcia L. Aaron  
Trustee, University of Oregon  
CEO & Founder, KIPP SoCal Public Schools  
[maaron@uoregon.edu](mailto:maaron@uoregon.edu)