

Hello members of the ways and means committee,

My name is Ben Baker and I am a student at Lane Community College working towards an AAS degree. Today I am asking for you to invest \$290 M in the Oregon Opportunity Grant, the state's largest need based financial aid program.

I receive the Oregon Opportunity Grant. The strain on myself and my family of paying for school during this pandemic is immense. I was working to my HTRM degree, then due to covid I lost my job as a cook and coop credits, I also lost the opportunity for work-study due to campus closure. forcing more loans. My school loans are paying my bills. Leaving me \$50 a week after cost. LCC has been great about keeping costs down to the best of their ability But as I now am borrowing money to pay my bills after unemployment failed me. Its a catch 22 situation. I borrowed to live and grow, but due to covid am now borrowing just to survive and will be in debt with little chance of repaying due to job loss and having to borrow instead of work-study grants. You really need to get going on funding students. I am so far in debt I am regretting returning to college after the handling of the pandemic by the state and federal govt. I see no future and have wasted a lot of time and money. My program was not run online, forcing me to switch major, and now cannot work to support myself and forcing me further into debt.

Right now, over $\frac{3}{4}$ of Oregon students who qualify for and need the Oregon Opportunity Grant do not receive it, purely due to severe underfunding. If Oregon is going to recover from COVID-19, it is vital that we invest in student aid so that students can afford to finish degrees and find good paying jobs after school. Now is a critical time to get the state where it needs to be regarding financial aid access.

Please remember my story as you work with your colleagues to set the budget for the next biennium, and please invest \$290 M in the Oregon Opportunity Grant. Thank you.