

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Aaron Lewis and I am a lifetime Oregon resident and student at the University of Oregon. I address you today with an urgent request to invest in Oregon students and approve \$900 million for the University Support Fund. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent economic fallout, we have arrived at a critical juncture for the future of Oregon higher education. To combat upcoming tuition hikes, the state must invest in our public universities. Doing so now will ensure that a new generation of Oregon students—one that better represents the state's diverse, evolving demographics—will have access to the economic and personal benefits of a university degree. Without state intervention, increasing costs will disproportionately sideline low-income students of color, perpetuating the very racial and class inequalities that a public university is designed to combat.

I have seen this with my own eyes. Since I enrolled at the University of Oregon just three years ago, tuition has increased by over eleven percent. That number promises to rise further, threatening educational access for the Oregon students who need it most. I expect to see even more of my classmates take extended time off from classes or drop out due to high tuition costs. In my hometown, I know of more and more students who are graduating high school and opting not to seek a bachelor's degree. Even "affordable" options like public universities are no longer affordable for many families. All of Oregon will suffer if the legislature does not address this crisis. Low enrollment and rising costs do not just preserve inequalities, they weaken the state economy in the long run. With a depleted and debt-saddled workforce, Oregon cannot hope to improve or even maintain its levels of social and economic prosperity. The state must invest now. The Public University Support Fund is just that: an investment in Oregon's future. I implore the committee to support this fund and give every Oregonian the chance to access the same quality higher education I have been fortunate enough to receive.

Sincerely,

Aaron Lewis