

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

My name is Sandra Koops and I live in Garibaldi, on the Oregon Coast in Senate District 16. I am a proud graduate of the University of Oregon College of Education, where I received a Master's degree in special education. As a former speech therapist, special education teacher, child protective services worker, and retiree on the rural Oregon Coast, I respectfully request you support robust investments in public higher education, including funding the Public University Support Fund at \$900 million, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant at \$200 million.

The UO has the number three special education graduate program in the nation. I attended the UO for my master's degree because as a former speech therapist, I saw firsthand the important role that special education teachers play in supporting the whole child. Yet despite the critical role of these professionals, there are not enough of them working across our state. Last year, an Oregon Secretary of State's audit found only one-third of Oregon children in special education courses received an adequate level of services, partially due to a shortage of special education teachers. These students deserve – and have a right – to receive a quality public education. Invest in our public universities to address the shortage of these important professionals.

Additionally, as someone who has worked and lived in rural Oregon for decades, and spent more than 20 years on the rural Oregon Coast, I believe all Oregon students – regardless of their zip code – deserve access to opportunity, including the opportunity to attend college and complete a degree. Many students from my county, Tillamook, attend college at UO, OSU, or PSU because these schools are affordable, accessible, and provide a top-notch education. I hope you'll fund the Public University Support Fund at \$900 million to ensure students continue to receive an education that allows them to live their dreams and contribute to our community, state, and country.

Further, while Oregon's public universities are an accessible option for many students, we have more work to do to ensure that all students – including lower- and middle-income, rural, and students of color – have the ability to attend college. Investments in financial aid are investments in our state's future. It is frustrating that our state ranks near the bottom for investments in student financial aid programs. I hope you'll commit to change that by funding the Oregon Opportunity Grant, our state's only need-based financial aid program.

Finally, I hope you will also support funding for extension services and our state's community colleges. These organizations provide significant benefits to rural Oregonians.

Thank you for listening to the budget needs of Oregonians, including rural Oregonians like me. As you weigh priorities and make decisions about our state's future, I hope you will prioritize funding for public education at ALL levels.

Sandra Koops
Garibaldi, Oregon