

Legislative Testimony

Good afternoon. My name is Tara Sprehe and I live in Portland. I am the Dean of Academic Foundations and Connections at Clackamas Community College and have worked in higher education in Oregon for 28 years.

I have a singular mission and that is to ensure the experience of students is such that they will enroll and succeed in meeting their education goals. This means providing access to affordable education, course content that is relevant and prepares students for *at least* a livable wage and an environment that is supportive of students needs both in and out of the classroom. What does this look like? Access to academic advisors. Access to financial aid specialists. Access to career coaches. Navigators, enrollment specialists, tutors and the disability resource center. Name the service and know that students need to be able to engage with staff when they have questions or they will leave our colleges perhaps for good.

When community colleges are not funded at a service level that keeps pace with inflation, we are unable to provide these critical resources for students. We cannot hire enough academic advisors, financial aid specialists or adequately staff tutoring or disability resource centers. We don't have enough staff to help our students stay enrolled to meet their goals.

I am urging you to support \$702 million in funding for community colleges. Tuition and college debt are already unaffordable for too many families, especially in the middle class. Community colleges need long-term, sustainable funding to continue to support students and Oregon's economic recovery in the coming years. To fully fund current services, colleges need a state appropriation of \$702 million for the 2021-2023 biennium. Every dollar cut from the Community College Support Fund must be made up by raising tuition or cutting programs and services, moving educational opportunities out of the reach of the Oregonians with the most need.

Community colleges serve students regardless of education and skill level, providing a true educational safety net and primary access point to economic opportunity. Community colleges like CCC need adequate funding from the state to continue providing valuable education in high-demand industries. It makes sense for our students, it makes sense for businesses, and it makes sense for the economy. Please support \$702 million in funding for community colleges. Please help us make a difference for students in a way that we currently cannot.

Please make community college funding a priority this legislative session. Thank you.