

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jules Walters and I am the Mayor and a resident of West Linn. I am also a graduate student at the University of Oregon. I respectfully request that you support funding the Public University Support Fund at \$900 million, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) at \$200 million.

Funding for Oregon's public universities creates opportunities for all Oregon students, and it is more critical now than ever. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities for BIPOC, lower-income, and rural students. It is critical that colleges and universities have adequate resources to address these disparities and ensure that all students have access to opportunity.

Our public universities and colleges have played an important role in addressing the pandemic. Reduced funding would challenge UO's ability to continue providing the fast, efficient, and accurate research and testing required to ensure our state's equitable recovery.

The willingness of policymakers to commit resources to protect the state's fragile cradle-to-career public education system may determine whether the impact of COVID-19 is measured in years or in generations. The budget needs of Oregon's education sector are a recipe for an equitable recovery. Budget cuts to higher education would be particularly harmful during this critical time.

The OOG is Oregon's largest state-funded, need-based grant program for college students. It is the state's only need-based aid program. Approximately 40,000 students receive Opportunity Grants each year, including my daughter, who is a current senior at UO. However, funding limitations have meant that the grant is not available to thousands of students who demonstrate significant financial need. Funding for the OOG should be increased in order to provide a realistic possibility of college affordability for Oregon's low- and middle-income students.

I know you will be forced to make tough budget decisions this session, and I hope you will prioritize funding for public education. Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,
Jules Walters