

February 15, 2021

Dear Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 564. My name is Dr. Autumn Green. I am a Research Scientist and Sociologist and Director of the Higher Education Access for Student Parents Research Initiative at Wellesley Centers for Women, based at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. I have dedicated my career to supporting student parents--especially student parents in my home state of Oregon. I offer this testimony as a private citizen, an Oregonian, a student parent alum of both Chemeketa Community College and University of Oregon, and as a national expert in the fields of higher education, mobility from poverty, and student parent success.

SB 564 offers a critical step towards expanding higher education equity and access for Oregonian public college and university students, and I strongly encourage you to support this important bill.

I grew up in Salem/Keizer and attended McNary High School, before leaving high school early to earn my GED, and start working on my Associate's degree at just sixteen years old. To say that I was a kid who grew up fast, is a complete underestimation of just how fast it was. By the time I was seventeen I was a college student, a wife, a mother, and working part-time through a local temp service doing clerical work. I walked for my Associates degree at Chemeketa Community College the year that I would have graduated from high school. To support my family through school I combined student financial aid and income from my job as a temp, with food stamps, the Oregon Health Plan, a child care tuition subsidy, and on-campus child care through Chemeketa. I was also privileged to have a highly dedicated and resourceful mom, who had been a student parent herself, and helped me research and access the benefits of these programs, and was a powerful mentor and ally to me throughout my educational path.

I then transferred to the University of Oregon where I moved first into the Spencer View Family Housing Apartments, and later into a house in the East Campus Family Housing Community. My children attended the Co-Op Family Center, where I also worked part-time in my children's classrooms in exchange for a significant tuition discount. The rest of my child care costs were subsidized through combining the ASUO's child care subsidy with the Oregon Student Block grant in my first year at UO, and with the UO's federally funded Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) program, after the Student Block Grant program was discontinued. While I also tried to apply for TANF, I was initially told that even as a teenage mom, I was ineligible as a college student. Later, faced with the choice between a program rule for the Oregon Student Block Grant that required me to forgo TANF to be eligible, I decided that with two kids under three years old, the student block grant was clearly a better value, and I knew it would support my education.

I remember vividly the day that I decided *not* to skip class to drive home to Salem to testify to save the Oregon Student Block Grant. I did not understand, at that time, that my own ability to stay in and succeed in school was about to be jeopardized. I will probably always regret not skipping class that day. When the Student Block Grant program was cut, I did not know how I would be able to cover my child care costs, resolving that if I

could not find any other way, I would take out private student loans to cover it. I had to stay in school. I knew that it was the only option that would lead my family out of poverty and towards the better life that we were working towards creating, and I would not be deterred.

Serendipitously, the UO received CCAMPIS funding and launched their program just in time to cover the gap, helping me to stay in school, and avoid borrowing more private student loans. I graduated from UO with my bachelor's degree in sociology earning High Honors from my department, and Magna Cum Laude recognition from the university. That summer I packed my kids in my car, and drove across the country to start graduate school at Boston College, where, ten years later, I would earn my doctorate in sociology, representing the doctoral graduating class of 2013 for all of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at commencement.

I am a success story of Oregon's support for student parents. But many of the programs that supported my journey to a bachelor's degree, no longer exist. **Without the necessary information about the need for these programs, they may have lost their funding, or they may have been institutionally deprioritized and discontinued.** Often these types of decisions are made because college administrators do not know how many of their students are parents, and do not recognize the services they provide as critical to helping them stay in school. Fortunately, the UO still offers all of the supportive programs that benefitted me as a student parent, but over the years I have witnessed Oregon's support for student parents wane by comparison to what once existed.

In Oregon, approximately 20% of all undergraduate students (41,614 students) are parents, with 15,433 single-mothers in attendance at Oregon colleges. This is admittedly only an approximation. The National Center for Education Statistics' public unrestricted dataset from which these numbers are based, only provides regional level data and thus these numbers are in fact, only estimates, based on enrollment numbers at colleges and universities across the "Far West Region" (including Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, and California). This data happens to come from the Institute for Women's Policy Research's analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics. **There is no other data available to identify or track student parents at the institutional or state level, information that is critically needed to support and sustain programs like those that supported my journey as an Oregon student parent.**

This is exactly why we need state and institutional data collection to include students' parenting status.

Each single mother who completes an Associate's Degree saves the State of Oregon \$28,859 in lifetime public assistance benefits; those who earn Bachelor's Degrees save the state \$47,393 over the course of their lifetimes. Single mothers who earn baccalaureate degrees are 64% less likely to live in poverty and earn \$733,444 more in earnings over the course of their lifetimes, than mothers who only complete high school. These mothers also pay \$274,392 more in lifetime tax contributions than those who do not attend college. Thus, **not only does SB 564 have minimal fiscal impact itself, supporting student parents to complete college degrees, actually saves the state money in the long-term.**

In the years during and after my time as a student parent in Oregon I have seen first-hand how desperately data is needed to help student parents succeed. As a national expert on student parent programs, and the former Director of the National Center for Student Parent Programs, I have been contacted by student parents from across the country who have been told by their colleges that they cannot justify expanded programs and support

for student parents without the data. Unfortunately--and in my opinion unprofessionally--these students were told by college administrators that *if* they could come back with data about student parent enrollment at their college, *then* they might be able to help. One of these students was an Oregon community college student and a single-dad, who emailed me to ask for help and ideas about how *he* might collect this data at his school; to my knowledge his efforts to advocate for student parents on his campus never stuck, and his school still offers minimal support. Another Oregon student parent who experienced the same issue at her community college and approached me for help to find student parent enrollment data is Michaela Martin, who has inspired and championed SB564 in response to her direct personal experience. While the efforts of these students are noble, the request made upon them as undergraduate students is inappropriate. Not only did these students have no direct means to access institutional enrollment data, as single-parents they also led incredibly busy lives and didn't have time nor training to collect or find data or conduct institutional data analysis. **Oregonian student parents need to be seen, heard, and supported, and this begins with institutional data collection and reporting on enrollment of pregnant and parenting students at Oregon's public colleges and universities.**

The lack of accurate and reliable data on Oregon student parent enrollment rates has stifled student parent success in Oregon. Although I regrettably did not skip class to testify to save the Oregon Student Block Grant, since then I testified unsuccessfully to prevent the elimination of Oregon's Parents as Scholars program. Part of the reason that the Parents as Scholars program was eliminated was that it was claimed to have been ineffective. My colleagues and I have searched deeply for any reports, studies, or information that was used to inform this decision, but found none. When I came to the Capitol to testify, I met about a dozen single-parents from across the state who were about to face a tough choice when the Parents as Scholars program was eliminated: drop out of college, or lose financial support. What we do know is that a wide majority of student parents nationally (61%) qualify for a zero-dollar expected family contribution through student financial aid, an indicator of very-low-income status. Among single-mother students, nine-in-ten live below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. **Supporting student parents helps these families permanently transition from poverty to prosperity.**

After I graduated I was glad to learn that the Student Block Grant program had been restructured and relaunched through the Oregon Student Assistance Commission. This is one of many organizations that might use student parent enrollment data to inform and improve on their work.

Importantly, supporting student parents is critical to creating inclusive and diverse campuses across our state. Student parents are disproportionately represented among groups that have been historically disenfranchised in higher education. Nationally, one-third of first-generation college students are parents. Among students of color, 40% of African-American female undergraduate students are mothers, as are more than a third of female students identifying as First Nations (36%), or Pacific Islander (35%); 26% of both Latina and white female students are moms. Male students of color are also more likely to be dads, with 21% of African-American, 21% of First Nations, and 23% of Pacific Islander undergraduate male students identifying as fathers, as compared to 14% of white and Latino male students. Lastly, there are more student mothers than student fathers. Seventy percent of student parents are mothers and 30% are dads. **Thus, supporting student parents not only promotes equity in education for students with children, but also substantially impacts issues such as educational equity and inclusion for students of color, first-generation students, women, and low-income students more broadly.**

Student parent data collection also bolsters the existing efforts of Oregon's postsecondary student parent support programs. Learning about the enrollment rates of student parents at Oregon's public colleges and universities helps these programs to be sustained and supported in the long-term. One excellent example is the student fee supported child care subsidies offered by Oregon State University, University of Oregon, Southern Oregon University, and Portland State University. Another example is the federally funded CCAMPIS child care initiatives at Lane Community College, Portland State University, Portland Community College, and Chemeketa Community College. These programs are required to report annual data to the U.S. Department of Education, which would be bolstered by student parent enrollment data. This data can also support new CCAMPIS applications from other Oregon institutions to justify the clear need for child care initiatives on their campuses. Student parent enrollment data is also useful to inform and estimate need for other campus services such as: child care centers, family housing, and student parent resource centers as well. Many federal and foundation-based funders also value this data in grant proposals, meaning that **student parent data can help sustain support for Oregonian student parents in both the short- and long-term.**

Many people--even those who work on college and university campuses--are unaware that parenting status is protected under Title IX law. Title IX protects pregnant and parenting students at a federal level from any form of exclusion from educational programs, extracurricular activities, or other campus-based programs or support services. **Student parent data will allow the state and individual institutions to consider how their transfer and acceptance rates, retention and graduation rates, and other outcome data pertaining to student parents reflect inclusion and equity for student parents.**

Nationally, only 33% of student parents complete *any* degree or certificate within six years of matriculation; this includes graduation from one- and two-year degree programs. When looking specifically at baccalaureate graduation rates, only 17.4% of student parents who begin college in baccalaureate programs graduate within six-years. This is despite the fact that on-average student parents earn *better* grades than their non-parenting classmates. **Collecting student parent data will help to advance equity and inclusion, and help Oregon's public colleges and universities ensure compliance with Title IX protections promoting equity and inclusion for pregnant and parenting students.**

Additionally, it is important to note that **the only demographic data currently available about student parenting status comes from FAFSA and is known to carry problems that significantly underestimate the student parent population.** While some students do not file FAFSA for a variety of reasons (e.g. less than half-time enrollment, outside sources of aid such as GI benefits, immigration status, lack of awareness, etc.), many students may also be reported as false negatives indicating that they are not parents when they are. For example, single parents must choose which parent claims their child each year. If the other parent claims the child on their taxes, the student may not claim them as a dependent on their FAFSA. Many single parents in this situation may be shouldering equal or greater parenting responsibilities, regardless of their filing status. Additionally, many young parents live in intergenerational families where their parents claim both them and their child as dependents, thus preventing their identification as parents through FAFSA data.

Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics does not provide data on graduate students, regardless of whether they file a FAFSA. These data can only be accessed at the institutional level.

Allowing students to regularly report their parenting status in demographic questionnaires is the most effective, streamlined, and accurate means of collecting valid and reliable data on the parenting status of Oregon public college and university students.

It is also important to emphasize that **student parents have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic**. Over the past year I have conducted virtual research on the impact of the pandemic on student parents that has included attendance at virtual events centering the student parent experience during the pandemic, Zoom interviews with student parent program directors, working with a team of student parent researchers in Hawaii who also face personal and academic obstacles due to the pandemic, and collecting and analyzing the stories and experiences of student parents as the pandemic has developed. What I have seen and heard is that student parents are dropping out of college at even more alarming rates than before! With kids learning from home, and child care programs and in-person instruction closed, student parents are now homeschooling their children while homeschooling themselves. Many have also lost their jobs due to the pandemic, and are struggling to make ends meet. Half of my team of student researchers in Hawaii has reduced their enrollment to part-time or left college entirely since September. A program director I interviewed told me that they were trying desperately to keep their parenting students in school, but had strong doubts about their ability to be successful. **Without student parent demographic data, there is no way to track or identify the numbers of student parents who drop-out of college, or have reduced their enrollment in response to the pandemic and economic crisis. We don't even know the degree to which COVID-19 has impacted student parents compared to non-parenting students.**

For all of these reasons, I offer my strong and enthusiastic support SB 564 and urge you to support this critically important legislation.

Thank you to Senator Gelser for championing this bill and to Chair Dembrow for sponsoring it. Thank you to the committee for this opportunity to submit my testimony in support of SB 564,

Sincerely and respectfully,

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