

Dear Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Brandon Atkins. I am the STEP (SNAP Training and Employment) program coordinator and instructor at Rogue Community College (RCC) in Southern Oregon. I am writing to request your support for **HB2835**.

Having a Benefits Navigator on my campus is important to me because our students at RCC in the face of the Covid pandemic and local fire devastation are struggling to get their basic needs met causing real world challenges for focusing on school/degree courses and completions toward successful self-sustainability. Additional support is needed for almost all of our students and a benefits navigator would provide this additional needed support.

Locally, unemployment rates, homelessness, and food insecurities have been highly impacted. Food assistance is not enough to meet students needs with a gap in over \$1 per meal needs not met. Poverty levels are reaching all time highs this last year.

A benefits navigator would be able to organize college and local resources and connect students directly to these resources, address these issues, and provide the following benefits.

Issues:

- Financial challenges and insecurities related to food, housing, child-care, transportation, tuition, books, school supplies, internet access, computers and technological needs
- Remote learning challenges
- Local fire devastation, loss of over 2,300 homes and businesses
- Unemployment rates above 11% (Rogue Valley)
- Student self and life management, college starting points and self-management
- Student stigmas surrounding receiving benefits
- Lack of family support and sense of community
- Need for employability, universal, and transferrable skills

Benefit of a Navigator:

- Direct contact and ongoing support to students
- Internal process development
- Mapping resource connection
- One on one advising/coaching promoting students feeling supported and college starting points
- Cohort models with extra support, a sense of community, peer support and resource connection.
- Internal college resources navigation
- External resource connections, DHS, WorkSource Rogue Valley, WorkForce Partnerships, and STEP providers
- Self-management resources and acquisition support, such as time management, budgeting and finances, and stress management
- Communication to students about stigmas and barriers and how to overcome mindsets and social stigmas
- Leveraging funds for resource connection and supports
- Benefits navigator works with students on identifying strengths, talents and personal abilities
- Connection to transportation, food and housing support needs
- Continued community partnership development

These resources would directly be enhanced by a benefits navigator to address and change these issues.
Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

Brandon Atkins

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brandon Atkins".

Medford, Grants Pass, and Ashland. (Josephine/Jackson Counties)