

February 10, 2021

Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the Committee,

My name is Angela Hamilton, and I work at Portland State University supervising the student-run PSU Food Pantry. I am also an alumni of Portland State where I completed my Master's. I am writing to request your support for [HB2835](#).

I believe it is important to have a Benefits Navigator on my campus for several reasons:

1. **Students have asked for more support in navigating barriers to access.** Through the listening project that Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon organized, Portland State students came out to communicate their needs and barriers to being successful in their academic pursuits, which pointed to the need for a Benefits Navigator.
2. **Many students aren't accessing the benefits that already exist.** As an example, 57% of low-income college students who were potentially eligible to receive SNAP reported not receiving it in a [2018 report from the Government Accountability Office](#).
3. **We are unable to meet this need and expertise with current staffing.** We have been trying to piece together SNAP application assistance for students for several years, but it is impossible for staff and faculty to be specialists in the multiple types of benefits available that our diverse student body could be eligible for, not to mention the time needed to really support the large number of students who are in need of and likely eligible for those benefits.
4. **PSU students report a very high prevalence of food and housing insecurity.** As I know you will hear from other testimonials about the research results published by PSU's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative, nearly half of our students reported experiencing food insecurity pre-COVID.
5. **Placing Benefits Navigators in colleges and universities puts resources where the need is very high and allows social service agencies to serve the general community where they are.** College students increasingly expect their institutions to provide them with wrap-around services, similar to the trend in hospitals. Because of the stigma associated with accessing public services that they have a right to, students are more likely to seek services at the college than going to a social service office, so having campus Benefits Navigators addresses a big issue of access.
6. **Higher education is a viable pathway out of needing social services in the future.** Research has shown that college students know that being food insecure is a temporary sacrifice they are willing to make in order to achieve their higher goals. For many first generation and nontraditional college students, getting their degree is not just a personal goal but a way to help move their families up the socioeconomic ladder.

Being a college student has changed a lot in the past 20 years when I first came to Oregon in 1993 to get my undergraduate degree. The cost of education has risen, the percentage of available aid compared to cost is much less, and the cost of living is much much higher. Fortunately, higher education has been successful at improving access for getting through the door at our public institutions, but unfortunately, we are needing to adapt to the growing basic needs that students struggle to meet while working toward their dreams of having a degree. Having Benefits Navigators on campuses is one small step toward not only improving graduation rates and student success but also directly serving a large population of Oregon residents.



Angela Hamilton
Portland