

Chair Alonso Leon and members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Dray Aguirre (he/him/his) and I am a pre-nursing student at Central Oregon Community College.

I identify as Hispanic and Native American of the Mission Cahuilla and Apache tribes.

I am and have been a homeless and food insecure student since 2019.

Trying to find the right resources without it affecting or taking away from the funds going towards my schooling is a pain in the a\*\*. While searching for help for myself on campus, I became aware of other students in similar situations. They had no knowledge about SNAP eligibility. So, I made it a priority to find help and advocate for other students like myself. It has been difficult because not many people in Central Oregon are aware or refuse to believe that students are struggling. The school barely had funds for a food closet, so the student government began purchasing food for students in need with whatever funds they could find. That was a start in the right direction, but definitely not enough. With the thought of being judged, mocked and feeling ashamed, students would not access the food closet. It is sad knowing that so many students end up going on without eating for days or even weeks. Becoming an advocate has given me the opportunity to lobby and speak on these issues on a state and federal level.

Our campus has a STEP Success Coach that helps students find a workforce program to secure benefits, as well as a part time staff member from THRIVE (a local non-profit). Unfortunately, these awesome people are not available for students full-time, so we end up trying to figure out how to access benefits ourselves.

If Central Oregon Community College students had access to a Full-Time benefits navigator that would help direct students to services and programs, it would greatly improve our success in school as well giving us peace of mind.

Thank you for your time,

Dray Aguirre  
Bend, Oregon