



Emily Wanous

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Dear Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the House Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Emily Wanous and I am the Legislative Director for the Oregon Student Association. I am here today testifying in support of HB2835. HB2835 would provide funding for a basic needs navigator position at Oregon's 7 public universities and 17 community colleges. This position would help connect students to vital federal and state programs, including but not limited to SNAP, housing vouchers and more.

In 2019, nationwide data depicts 2 out of 5 students being food insecure in the past year. In Oregon, that statistics increases to 41% of students at Oregon's institutions reported being food insecure in the last year. The reality for many students today is perfecting the balancing act of working multiple jobs, gaining experience via internships or extracurricular activities, and succeeding in the classroom. While this balancing act is an impressive show of resiliency and adaptability, it is not sustainable nor is it enough for many of our students.

According to HECC data, close to half of all students at Oregon's higher education institutions were unable to afford the cost of their education after public grant aid, family contributions, and student earnings--with students of color experiencing higher rates than their white counterparts. Basic needs insecurity is not an isolated trend and is directly connected to constant tuition increases, an inadequate financial aid program that currently only supports 1 out of 4 students who qualify for aid, and a deprioritization of higher education funding from the state. We must be intentional about how we support our students, which is why the Oregon Student Association believes this bill will be successful in ameliorating basic needs insecurities for students.

We understand the State has a responsibility to prioritize need in response to the pandemic, all while keeping the budget balanced. I am here to tell you this bill should be prioritized and integrated into the overall pandemic response, considering higher education institutions--more specifically students--are the driving force behind Oregon's ability to meet current and future workforce demands. If state leaders expect our college students to fuel the economy, there must be support systems in place to increase student success through graduation. Basic needs insecurities amongst college students are not a new phenomenon and the pandemic has only heightened these disparities. **Our students deserve access. Our students deserve your vote.**

Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions or comments.