

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-19 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 insecurity 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 with 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)