

02/10/21:

Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Madelyn Belden. I am a student at Portland State University in Portland. I am writing to request your support for **HB2835**.

▶ Having a Benefits Navigator on my campus is important to me because though I have never experienced food insecurity myself and have the financial resources to sustain myself at the moment, those close to me have experienced financial and food insecurity which jeopardized their mental and physical health and caused them deep trauma and harm. I know college students and people my age who weekly ask themselves the question: if I work extra to make rent and buy groceries, will I have enough time to do homework? No college student should have to settle for inadequate access to food and consequently, manage the mental health repercussions of financial instability and academic duress. I know from the experience of a family member and multiple friends that you can work multiple jobs while managing a college education and still end the week without enough money to pay for next week's meals, much less rent for the next month. With the introduction of benefits navigators on my campus and in Oregon schools, students who don't have the time to research on their own between work, school, and other commitments will have the guidance and support to meet their basic needs. When students aren't placed into a position in which they need to disregard their needs, they have the opportunity to prioritize their education without concern for their day to day survival. More importantly, their autonomy, agency, and dignity are recognized which instills resilience and grit among college students. We must also recognize that BIPOC and underprivileged groups are most susceptible to food and basic needs insecurities among other threats to their completion of college—54% of Black students and 60% of Indigenous students identify as food insecure. Passing HB2835 and implementing a benefits navigator will be a step towards restorative justice for the most neglected populations attending college in providing programming, outreach, and support systems. College is expensive and incredibly inaccessible as is and the money these students invest into their education should be reflected by the same institutions' investment in their futures.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

Madelyn Belden, Portland