

Dear Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee,

My name is Bill Burgess, Marion County Clerk and father, friend and supporter of women and men working through college. It is imperative that students raising children are successful in their pursuit of higher education. Not only does this increase opportunity and chance of income and economic stability for them and their children. We need their help in improving our community through use of their hard-earned knowledge, skills, abilities and insights. I am writing today in support of SB 564.

Currently, Oregon lacks comprehensive data to indicate the number of college students that are also parents. This lack of data creates a significant barrier to making appropriate determinations about the specific educational needs and outcomes of student parents.

Identifying this key demographic information will allow institutions to best determine the proper allocation of resources that seek to increase access to higher education for student parents and support them in the completion of their degrees.

This matters to me because all families should have access to higher education. My good friend, Michaela Martin, now in her second year of law school, has persistently been fighting for this for years. She knows the struggle and sacrifice student parents go through to better themselves, their families and their communities. Let's do all we can to help them succeed.

It is also important to acknowledge that the Covid-19 pandemic has created even more difficulties for student parents who are now attempting to homeschool themselves and their children as they pursue college degrees.

All students deserve to have the programs they need in order to succeed academically and Senate Bill 564 is the first step towards making this possible.

I believe that requiring public post-secondary institutions to identify whether a student is a parent, acting as a parent, or a guardian is an essential and desperately needed tool in the fight to lower the educational barriers for parenting students and close the achievement gap.

This is why I urge you to support SB 564.

Let student parents be counted.

Let them be seen.

Let their stories resonate through this hearing room, because they deserve to be heard.

Thank you to Senator Gelser for championing this bill and to Chair Dembrow for sponsoring it. Thank you to the committee for this opportunity to submit my testimony in support of SB 564,

Bill Burgess
Marion County Clerk
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