

Chair Alonso Leon and members of the House Committee on Education, thanks for taking the time to hear my testimony in support of House Bill 2835, which would formally establish basic needs navigators at public institutions of higher education across the state.

My name is Benjamin Turner and I am a senior at Portland State University. I am majoring in Social Work with a minor in Civic Leadership, and I'll be graduating this Spring. Most relevant to this hearing today, I am the Resource Coordinator at the University's student-run food pantry. There, I am a part of a team that works to provide supplemental food items to current PSU students on a regular basis, in a welcoming, inclusive, and dignified environment.

The work we do is vital given the high rates of food insecurity at Portland State. A recent, pre-pandemic study done by the University's Homelessness Research and Action Collaborative (HRAC) found that nearly half of all PSU students experience some form of food insecurity, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture. This is much higher than the national average rate of food insecurity, wherein around 1 in 10 households experienced some form of food security in 2019. For certain demographic groups at PSU, food insecurity rates are even higher than our awful average; notably, BIPOC students and trans and queer students experience above average rates of food insecurity, ranging from the mid-50s to the mid-60s.

The point I'd like to make in support of this bill is one of visibility. Despite the high prevalence of basic needs insecurities on college campuses, it's a challenge students often face alone. Stigma, shame, and dismissal pervade the experience of having unmet needs as a college student. Because of this isolation, students don't know about or feel bad about accessing

resources like food pantries and SNAP. The presence of basic needs navigators would be an important step in acknowledging the challenges facing too many of my peers.

When a student enrolls in a college and goes to orientation, they meet with an advisor, because it's acknowledged that figuring out what classes to take can be like navigating a maze. They get a tour of the library, because it's inevitable that they'll need some help researching or will need a quiet place to study. Student life and recreation gives presentations on clubs and sports, because being in community is supposed to be a part of the college experience. But right now, students aren't introduced to a basic needs navigator who will help them find assistance when it's likely needed. We can change that.

I implore you to send this bill to the House floor with a recommendation for passage because it's far past time for us to acknowledge widespread basic needs insecurity at institutions of higher education in our state. We need systemic changes for systemic problems; let's work together to make sure all students are fed and housed.

Thank you.