

Dear Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee,

My name is Vanessa Shea and I am writing today in support of SB 564. I am a student at Portland State University, and I am a parent of 4 children ages 15 to 5 (3 of whom experience developmental disability and 2 who are deaf).

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 as a woman, mother, and parent of children with disabilities I have struggled to maintain steady employment at my low paying jobs. Every time I have had to leave a “job” I have acquired a 7% reduction in my lifetime earning potential. As a person who has survived these intersectional barriers to success in society, I know I am smart and capable, and I have so much to offer in the workforce and in my community. Access to education opens the door for me to do this in a sustainable way that adds to the quality of my life and my work. Access to education improves the quality of my children’s lives and care. Access to education reduces my/my family’s dependence on social services and allows us to participate in supporting and growing the economy. Regardless of which lens you use when looking at this issue, it comes back to yes, you should absolutely want to know what is going on with parents seeking higher education.

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 us be seen.

Let our stories resonate through this hearing room, because we 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,

Vanessa Shea