

My name is Jazzmen Socorro Vega-Heath. I am the Vice President of the Oregon Black Business Alliance. I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill 564.

I attended Lane Community College in pursuit of a Nursing Degree. I am a full-time single parent and I was forced to make the decision to leave school indefinitely.

I spent 11 years tirelessly working in memory care, long term care, brain trauma, rehabilitation facilities, and providing in-home/hospice care. I suffered a severely compressed disk in my spine. Causing me to unjustly lose my employment and seek out a new career because my injury is an inability to continue what I had originally gone to school for. In 2017 due to my full-time work schedule, solo parenting, and going to school my health began to plummet. I was burning my candle at both ends and went to the hospital several times for dehydration and exhaustion. I was not able to provide for myself or my child at that time and I definitely could not function as a student.

I was stressed not knowing what support I had as a student parent. Like many colleges throughout the state, the culture of my campus catered to traditional students. I was faced with locked classroom doors and limited childcare. I had many days my son sat beside me in class so that I could complete an exam or just make attendance. These types of hurdles are not new to me because as an Afro-Latina my struggles aren't tallied up.

Higher education is important to me because I remember being a young girl having to read my grandmother's mail to her because she couldn't. For her, many opportunities were still in the process of being fought, in order for her existence to count. Therefore it is my responsibility to break these generational curses that are hidden behind a broken system that conveniently keeps single parents like me from achieving a better future for our children. I am simply asking to be counted.

Jazzmen Socorro Vega-Heath