

HB 2262 Testimony: March 14, 2023 Public Hearing

Good afternoon, Chair Lively and members of the House Committee on Higher Education. My name is Madeline Hagar, and I am the Basic Needs Coordinator for Food Security and Community Access Initiatives at the University of Oregon.

I am here to ask that you continue to fund the benefits navigator positions on university campuses as outlined in a provision of House Bill 2262.

I am part of a three-person team that provides basic needs support to University of Oregon students. The director's position is currently funded by the state, while the two coordinators, which includes me, are funded by student fees that were allocated by the campus student government. The student government has also provided the program with funds that are used to support a wide variety of programming, including financial support for academic materials, childcare, and housing. The existing state and campus funding allocations have enabled our campus to begin to address basic needs insecurity AND establish a new, foundational program that is now part of a broader campus network of student support services. Continued funding is needed to further this work.

In my role, I provide one-on-one case management support and oversee food security programming on campus. This often looks like me walking students through supplemental nutrition assistance program applications or discussing how to access local food pantries, as well as working across campus to create programming that increases student access to nutritious and culturally appropriate foods. These efforts help foster a sense of belonging on our campus and connects students to essential services that impact their physical health and overall social and emotional well-being. This support also directly helps addresses financial insecurity so students can focus on achieving their academic and career goals. Finally, basic needs support is particularly important for our students who are first generation, identify as LGBTQIA, and/or are students of color.

I urge you to continue and expand the funding for the benefits navigator positions, as these positions are critical to furthering capacity within higher education institutions to reduce the number of students experiencing financial distress as a result of structural drivers of basic needs insecurity like income inequality, rising costs of education, and increasing costs of living.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.