



Higher Education Funding Taskforce

03/23/2023

Chair Lively, Vice Chair Ruiz, Vice Chair McIntire, and members of the committee,

My name is Nick Keough; I am the Legislative Director of the Oregon Student Association. **I am writing you all today to ask for your support on HB 2265, which would create a legislative taskforce with the goal of determining methods to increase funding for post-secondary institutions of education.**

As I am sure the members of this committee are painfully aware of now, higher education in Oregon is in crisis. Tuition and fees have skyrocketed in cost over the last few decades pricing generations of Oregonians out of post-secondary education. State financial aid has not kept pace with even coming close to covering cost of tuition, let alone the soaring costs of food and housing across Oregon. Students are not the only ones struggling. Our institutions of higher education are struggling financially themselves, resulting in cuts to critical programs and services, faculty and staff layoffs, and even some institutions at risk of closing their doors all together. How did we get here?

Largely, this is a result of the state's disinvestment and underinvestment in post-secondary education over the last decade. Post-secondary education in Oregon is funded primarily in three ways: state-funding, tuition revenue, and federal funding and other revenue. Of these three sources of funding, state funding accounts for a minority of total revenues. When the state doesn't invest, this prompts a heavy reliance on student tuition and fee dollars in the absence of state appropriations. This is why we see yearly tuition increases that result in students and their families, increasingly applying for student loans, and going into substantial debt to afford college.

Budgets are moral documents. They reflect who we are, what our values are, and what our priorities are as State. Our disinvestment in higher education is something we should all collectively be ashamed of. Our colleges and universities are critical component of a healthy and prosperous society. Post-secondary education allows students to sharpen their critical thinking skills and create better opportunities for themselves and their families. We know how critical our colleges and universities can be when it comes to workforce development, a strong economy, and preparing the future leaders of our State.

Yet, every year we are not making the investments we need to be in higher education. We are well below the national average for funding higher education, and our neighbors in California and Washington are making far outpacing us. When legislators ask how will we pay to adequate investments in post-secondary education, I ask how can we afford not to? The future of Oregon is on the line.

It is for these reasons that the Oregon Student Association strongly supports HB 2265. We need a plan to find revenue that will finally help fund post-secondary education to the level that students deserve.

Thank you,

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