

Julian Roth  
Regarding HB 3499  
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My name is Julian Roth and I am a student at Portland State University. I am testifying about the cost barrier to higher education in Oregon, and am writing this testimony in **support** of HB 3499.

I am a first-generation college student and I grew up in Beaverton in a middle-class household. Despite being middle-class, my family could not afford to save money for me to go to college. Though when I graduated high school, I was fortunate enough to gain the pell grant only because both of my parents were unemployed after deaths in the family, which put us below the poverty line on my FAFSA. **I never would have been able to afford or attend college without the pell grant**, but I also would have never been able to afford college if my family wasn't below the poverty line, which is a terrifying thought.

Even though my tuition was covered by the Pell grant, I still had to pay for my textbooks (upwards of \$200 each term), my parking (over \$400 each term), my additional transportation expenses including gas and vehicle maintenance (\$4000 a year), and my personal bills and living expenses for the 5 years it took me to receive my undergraduate degree. I worked from the time I was 17 to until I graduated with my undergraduate degree just so that I could afford to pay the additional costs associated with college and my other living expenses that my family could not afford. I had to strategically work part time so that I wouldn't lose my Pell grant, while also trying to work enough to support myself and afford the additional costs associated with college. **I was perpetually held in a state of poverty due to how education is funded in this state and in this country.**

I remember professors docking me points when I had to leave class early to pick up a shift, or missing assignment deadlines because I was at work. I remember crying on the way home from class because I was exhausted and hungry, but couldn't afford to purchase food. Then, I would rush to complete an assignment before rushing to my night shift, getting home at 1am for a few hours of sleep just to do it all over again the next day. I worked a total of 70 hours (40 full-time school, 30 part-time work) throughout those 5 years, which greatly impacted my mental and physical health. **In order to receive the Pell grant, you have to be poor. But in order to survive, you need to work a full-time job and still cut corners due to the rising cost of living. Student recruitment is suffering for colleges across Oregon—isn't it obvious why?** This dichotomy puts students like me who seek to better their lives, break generational poverty, and pursue education in a situation where they must work twice as hard and forfeit their mental and physical wellbeing. Who would choose that? I thought about dropping out many times, but knew that my life would never change unless I completed a 4-year degree. Though, what I went through to obtain my degree was traumatizing and will forever negatively impact my life.

House Bill 3499 would change the lives of many students in Oregon. **Education should be a choice, not a privilege.** This country and this state could do better to support the economy and our citizens by offering free education to the countless parents who wish to return to school,

youth who will never have the chance otherwise, and those pursuing a career change when they are laid off. This bill would support gender equity by allowing mothers to pursue an education, increase fertility as more parents would be able to pursue college, support the economy by creating more jobs and skilled workers, and create more civically engaged people in our state. If this bill passed, Oregon would be an example in this country. There are countless hardworking and dedicated Oregonians who wish to pursue education but cannot afford to—I was one of them. Generational poverty and lack of education will continue to strain our economy and its citizens until there is more financial support for education, and a structural change in how the educational system operates. I repeat: **Education should be a choice, not a privilege.**

Thank you to Representative Chaichi and Representative Pham K, as well as the House Committee On Higher Education for reading and hearing my testimony. I hope that the committee will consider the thousands of people, their lives, and their future generations, who would be positively impacted by supporting this bill. I appreciated your time and your effort in considering this testimony.