

Submitter: Jason Kovac

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education

Measure: HB5025

Dear Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you to express my strong support for Oregon House Bill 5025, which aims to increase funding for our community colleges.

As an employee at Clackamas Community College, I can attest to the importance of the Community College Support Fund in providing access to affordable and high-quality higher education.

Community colleges are the affordable option for access to higher education in Oregon, and they serve students at all education and skill levels, including educating students with the greatest barriers to attaining post-secondary education and training. However, due to inflation, supply shortages, and the lingering impacts of the pandemic, colleges now need \$855 million to maintain current levels of services, programs, and staffing.

Every dollar cut from the Community College Support Fund must be made up by raising tuition or cutting programs and services, moving educational opportunities out of the reach of the Oregonians with the most need. This impacts students significantly, as we rely more on these critical wraparound college services to support us as we pursue our education.

If tuition increases at CCC, it would mean our students would have to take out more loans or work longer hours, which would make it even more difficult to balance work and school.

Moreover, wraparound services are becoming an essential safety net for vulnerable students. Community colleges serve more systematically marginalized students than any other sector of higher education, and demand for mental health and wraparound services increased significantly during the pandemic. Oregon colleges have played a leading role in helping students navigate the complicated process of applying for federal benefits like SNAP and other forms of federal assistance that support basic needs.

Before the pandemic, community college students already faced unacceptably high rates of food and housing insecurity, and a recent study showed that 41 percent of community college respondents faced food insecurity over a 30-day period in the fall of 2019. 52 percent reported they had faced housing insecurity and 20 percent had experienced homelessness over the previous year.

Finally, community colleges are vital in providing the skills and training necessary to

attain jobs in local industries. Community colleges are best positioned to serve these learners. Thanks to the CTE programs at Clackamas Community College, students are working toward getting back into the workforce in a living wage job.

In conclusion, I urge you to support Oregon House Bill 5025, which will ensure that community colleges have the necessary funding to provide affordable education, wraparound services, and job training to students across the state.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.