

Dear Joint Ways and Means Committee,

I would like to thank each of you for meeting here today, and for your time and consideration on this issue. I hope for an outcome that is beneficial for us all as Oregonians.

My name is Olivia Duff, and I am a sophomore at the University of Oregon. I had the pleasure of living in Oregon for all my 19 years, specifically growing up in Redmond with my parents and younger brother. I have seen almost every corner of Oregon, from Ashland to Athena, and Portland to Burns. After high-school, I was accepted to U of O to study political science with a focus on international relations, diplomacy, and conflict resolution.

Attending college was always part of the plan. In my city, you didn't often talk about post-high-school options unless it included you walking across the stage dressed in a cap and gown. For many Central Oregonians, working and supporting youth became a community goal through scholarships, youth-based clubs, jobs, and internship outreach. These programs were graciously sponsored by individuals in educational, recreational, residential, religious, and political fields. With encouragement from my family and friends, many youths, along with myself, were able to take advantage of these opportunities. One of these opportunities even allowed me to represent the Redmond youth in the City Hall Downtown Urban Renewal Action Committee, appointed by the former mayor of Redmond, George Endicott. From this support, I received multiple acceptance offers and can attend the University of Oregon. Upon arriving at U of O, I found a similar environment that is always encouraging, and realistic and has helped me find opportunities to further immerse myself in my field. Looking back to approximately two years ago when I had to make my college decision, while thankful for my opportunities, I can't help but remember that part of what made my decision for me was fear of being unable to finance other offers.

Much of my financial dependency is placed on my parents. My mother is a Community Relations Manager for Rimrock Trails Treatment Services, a nonprofit organization that provides mental health, counseling, and substance abuse aid for individuals and families. My father is a self-employed accountant with a CPA firm in Redmond. In addition to being a student at U of O, I am also a member of the Robert D. Clark Honors College, and appointed officer within the Kappa Delta sorority. I have been working since I was 16, first at Panda Express, then at Ida's Cupcake Café of Central Oregon, and currently at the University of Oregon Government and Community Outreach Department. My younger brother, who has recently joined the workforce this year through Dutch Bros, will be graduating high school this spring to study Pre-Med at the Oregon Institute of Technology with the help of scholarships. We are considered a middle-class family, and while we live comfortably and have steady sources of income, it is very intimidating to know that the costs of college and other educational opportunities are not things we could easily afford on our own.

As a daughter of an accountant, you quickly learn to crunch the numbers on what financial independence means, and for many, it is not possible without education to properly build a path to a career. Many students are being forced to choose a hard and expensive career path to gain a chance at financial stability in this ever-changing and intimidating economy. In just 3 years, all of us have stood face to face with a pandemic, multiple business closures, inflation partially

caused by an international war, and prices that have shattered whatever we used to see as the roof. This is something other generations have experienced in either their personal or professional life, as I am sure you have seen a form of this insecurity at some point. And while the rest of what we have experienced may be different, I know for a fact that we have all been impacted by the power of higher education. My perspective as a member of a middle-class family of 4 from Central Oregon is just one of the many who will be and currently are choosing how to finance and reach their educational goals.

As other likeminded testimony will address today, come time, we are asking you to support Oregon's students through investments in public higher education, including funding the Public University Support Fund (PUSF) at \$1.05 billion and increasing the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) by \$200 million. We will also ask you to sustain funding for tribal student grants, which help fund undergraduate tuition, housing, books, and other costs for eligible, enrolled members of Oregon's Tribes. We will back these requests up by addressing that Oregon ranks 45th in the country for per-student, state funding of public universities and invests less than half the national average in financial aid per public university student. We will do all this and more to try and gain support for where we currently need it most.

But most importantly, we as a people, as Oregonians, are asking for help as the next group of people expected to help take on the world. We are asking for your help or the promise of recognition that we are not alone, and we will not have to fear making one choice that will later condemn us for having the hope to have made it.

Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee, thank you for your time, consideration, and patience with the daughter of an accountant.

Best Wishes,

Olivia Duff
University of Oregon