

4-26-2023

Joint Committee on Education

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain

900 Court Street NE

Salem, OR 97301

Please support full funding for The Oregon Opportunity Grant

Co-Chairs Frederick, McLain, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jonathan Vazquez and I live in Eugene. I am a senior at the University of Oregon. As you are making important budget decisions this legislative session, I implore you to support Oregon's students through robust 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. In addition to investing in the PUSH and OOG, I encourage 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.

I myself am a major proponent of investing in public education, for three distinct reasons. The first is that as a first generation college student from an immigrant family, education has and is my way towards achieving that fabled dream. The American dream of earning a just and honorable living for the fruits of my labor. A dream that for me, becomes clearer day by day. As I finish my degree and take advantage of the professional and personal relationships I have been able to cultivate in university.

However none of this would have been possible without state funding. I would not have been able to attend a university without such help as the Oregon Opportunity Grant. That has greatly helped me to afford higher education. In effect, it has given me an opportunity to advance in life as a well educated and prepared Oregonian. That is why my second reason for supporting higher education is that when you invest in education, you are investing in the future of Oregon. This is not some abstract concept, or some scheme to further the interests of the few. This is simply investing in the institutions that prepare people like me, to be competitive and proactive in our local, state, and national economies. In order to help Oregon maintain its place as a prosperous and beautiful place to live.

Although the reality is 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. That is why as Oregon's students and workforce continue to face lasting

impacts from the pandemic, we must ensure that higher education is more attainable for every student. In order to keep the dream that is Oregon alive.

That is why my final reason for supporting the Oregon Opportunity Grant and higher education more broadly is that I want my nieces and nephews who are all currently in Oregon's K-12 educational system to have the same opportunities I have had. The opportunity to advance on the social-economic spectrum and to live in a beautiful and just home as Oregon. Yet this will depend on your own courage and strength to see that higher education is protected and celebrated in the State of Oregon. In order for my nieces, nephews and for all Oregonians to have a chance in life. To have a chance at the American and Oregon dream.

Thank you for your service to our state and thank you for supporting Oregon's students and public higher education institutions.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Vazquez

University of Oregon