

April 28, 2023
Joint Committee Ways and Means
Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Please support full funding for higher education

Co-Chairs Steiner, Sanchez, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dan Vi Nu Nguyen and I live in Beaverton. I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Physics from Portland State University in 2004. I am now coming back to be a PSU Alumni Volunteer at Portland State University. As you are making important budget decisions this legislative session, I encourage 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.

I was among the first generation to attend university in my family members. I was supported by a Financial Aid grant to attend school. I was also supported academically by the school environment such as the TRIO program, Students Leadership Program, Department of Physics, etc. while I attended school there.

I experienced much hardship, but I made it in order to graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Physics at university. I always wish to pursue higher education in the United States of America. It was a dream that came true for me and my family and I achieved my dream of fulfilling my parent's hope of supporting their children to pursue higher education.

In return, I know the importance of supporting the young in pursuing higher education, and that is my goal of me to be part of the school environment where I can support students in any way I can.

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. 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.

- Funding for Oregon's public universities creates opportunities for all Oregon students, and it is more critical now than ever. After multiple years of pandemic-related challenges, students have greater needs than ever before. It is critical for the state to support wraparound services such as financial aid, academic support, career development, and basic needs support – including food and housing assistance through Benefits Navigators – to meet the growing needs of our increasingly diverse student bodies.
- While a 4-year degree and beyond is a critical step in opening opportunities for all students, especially those from BIPOC communities, many students see college as unaffordable. Often, students are balancing meeting their basic needs with obtaining a college degree to support their career goals. Oregon's public universities have been stepping into the gap, doing more with less, and working to support students. But they need the state to step in to help give all students an opportunity for success.
- Oregon is facing critical workforce shortages. To address these shortages, the state must prioritize creating a highly skilled workforce to support essential industries. Oregon's public universities are responding to industry needs despite limited state resources, creating a diverse pipeline of highly skilled workers to power our economy.
- A \$1.05 billion budget will allow public universities to continue offering education and services for students without increasing tuition beyond 5 percent at most universities.

In addition to investing in the PUSF 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.

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

Sincerely,

Dan Vi Nu Nguyen

