

May 3, 2023

Senator Steiner and Representative Sanchez, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Vice-Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and members of the Committee,

I am a doctoral student in Public Affairs and Policy at Portland State University. I have the honor of serving as the President of the Graduate Employee Union, and I represent my union on the AAUP Oregon Executive Council. As a concerned graduate student and researcher, and on behalf of my union's members, I urge you to support better higher education funding in Oregon's budget for the next biennium by appropriating \$1.05 billion for the Public University Support Fund, \$855 million for the Community College Support Fund, an additional \$25 million to provide crucial support to the Technical and Regional Universities and Portland State University, and \$400 million for the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

For decades, our nation's under-funded public university system has increasingly offset hemorrhaging budgets by relying on low-wage graduate employees and part-time faculty. These workers are asked to take on larger portions of the teaching and research workload as tenure-track and full-time instructional positions are deemed too costly due to insufficient state support. This is particularly true in Oregon's public universities and community colleges; we are 45th in the nation for state investment in higher education, and each year, tuitions rise and enrollments drop as students find it increasingly difficult to seek or complete their educational goals in Oregon.

Due to our low wages and high work- and course-load, myself and many of my union's members have had to make significant sacrifices in order to stretch our meager budgets and pursue our advanced degrees. In fact, graduate employees are so poorly supported in this state that many of them would qualify for SNAP benefits if their labor did not specifically exclude them from qualifying. No student in Oregon should starve for their studies, and support for SB 609A would provide graduate employees with food security through access to SNAP benefits.

The challenges faced by graduate employees due to high tuition costs and anemic state support are shared by our fellow undergraduate students as well as the staff and faculty who attempt to see the university's mission through despite depressed wages, cut programs, and shuttered services. Legislative and administrative choices brought us to our current state of misfortune, and without greater commitment from our legislature, the situation will only grow more dire. An appropriation of \$1.05 billion for the PUSF, \$855 million for the CCSF, and \$400 million for the OOG in the next biennium demonstrates a commitment to make higher education more accessible for the next generation of working Oregonians. In light of the additional challenges

faced by my institution and Oregon's TRUs, I also ask that you authorize \$25 million in bridge funding to ensure the continued success of these vital institutions.

Finally, in solidarity with part-time faculty at PSUFA and across Oregon, I ask that you support the part-time faculty healthcare fixes in HB2611 A. The modern university system cannot function without these valuable workers, and because of their low wages and limited benefits it would not be an understatement to say that these pieces of legislation could be life changing for many of them.

Thank you for your commitment to Oregon's students, staff, and faculty.

Carl Christiansen

President, Graduate Employees Union of Portland State University

Academic Unions at PSU: Fighting for a Fair Contract!

