

Submitter: Tiana Oaks
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

I am Tiana Oaks, The manager of the Employment Planning Internships and Coaching (EPIC), and Oregon Conservation Corps of Umpqua Valley (OCC) Programs, serving opportunities youth in Douglas County. These programs provide entry to employment opportunities, coaching and referral to wrap around services that ensures clients develop the tools to create self-sustainable practices, long after our role in their lives end. The elements of supportive services, including everything needed to succeed at work, from eyeglasses to work boots, combined with the elements of future planning, makes the difference between getting a job but struggling to retain it, and developing the underlying life skills that create long-term success. Oregon Conservation Corps is one of the only entry to employment opportunities that doesn't require a physical address, or prior experience. Through our program, we have supported many crew members in securing housing, work clothes, transportation, and budgeting skills to become self-sufficient, or even begin to save for next steps. We are able to enter students onto this employment pathway as young as 16, on the Oregon Youth Corps who then graduate to the adult crew Conservation Corps to continually grow and expand their skillsets, while moving to more lucrative wage ranges. Several of our crew members have gone on to secure careers with Bureau of Land Management, United States Forest Service, or Private Wild-land firefighting companies, who have remarked how well prepared our trainees are "for the real world". With reduced funding for these programs, many youth will struggle unsupported to enter fields of employment and instead of becoming contributing citizens paying into social systems, may instead draw from them. With reduction in funding for, specifically fuels reduction work, we are losing precious workforce hours to continually be preemptive about seasonal wildfire, as the scope of the work narrows or cannot be maintained, this allows for fuels to re-grow in certain areas, making these regions potentially more vulnerable to catastrophic fires in years to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Tiana Oaks BS, MA

OCC of Umpqua Valley Program Manager