

March 15, 2023

Joint Ways & Means Committee Co-Chairs
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Sen. Steiner and Rep. Sanchez,

As advocates for students and higher education in Oregon, we are writing to urge you to support investments in student financial aid, community college and public university supports funds, and recommendations from the [Joint Task Force on Underrepresented Student in Higher Education](#) in your Co-Chairs Budget Framework for the 2023 Legislative Session.

Investing \$400 million in the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) would allow Oregon residents with financial need to access a proven program that consistently demonstrates recipients are more likely to persist and graduate. Increasing the overall funding of the OOG would increase access for more low- and middle-income Oregon residents and increase maximum award amounts.

In order to maximize the state's investment, it is important to pair investments in student financial aid with investments in institutional support funds.

The public universities are seeking \$1.05 billion for the Public University Support Fund (PUSF). This is a stability-level budget request that will ensure public universities can continue to provide important wraparound services for an increasingly diverse student body. Oregon currently ranks 45th nationally for state funding per full-time student. An investment of \$1.05 billion will relieve tuition pressure on students and begin moving Oregon toward the national average for state funding per student.

Oregon's community colleges are seeking \$855 million for the Community College Support Fund (CCSF). The \$855 million in CCSF funding will help colleges cover cost increases in the next biennium, providing a funding base from which colleges can continue to maintain many critical programs and services. Even at this requested funding level however reductions will still be necessary at many colleges.

To support students and help mitigate the need for reductions, we would also ask that you and the Legislature invest in institutional stability by designating \$75 million in one-time funds to support innovative approaches to sustainability at public universities facing challenges and programs that better recruit and retain students at community colleges. Institutional representatives from community colleges and public universities, including those from technical and regional universities, are eager to provide additional detail on how these funds would contribute to ensuring students receive the services and supports that they need to be successful.

Lastly, we urge you to consider funding some of the recommendation from the [Joint Task Force on Underrepresented Student in Higher Education](#) (Task Force). This bi-cameral, bi-partisan legislative Task Force was established by [House Bill 2590](#) (2021) and included Senators Dembrow, Frederick, Wagner and Findley, and Representatives Alonso Leon, Ruiz, Owens and Zika. The Task Force completed a statewide tour of higher education institutions and received presentations from experts on topics such as financial aid, student retention and DEI best practices. Their findings and recommendations can be found [here](#). We collectively support their recommendations to increase the OOG and continue the Oregon Tribal Grants and ask that you consider reserving funds in your 2023 Budget Framework to support recommendations from the Task Force for programs that currently exist upon campuses. Those programs have been developed by each college and university to address their students' unique needs. Investments to support existing programs - many of which have operated on limited budgets for decades and have required tuition or student fee dollars to fund – could be supported in the form of block grants for the following purposes:

- Increasing support for Benefits Navigators established by [HB 2835](#) (2021);
- Comprehensive programs for first-generation and underserved students, including outreach to high schools, coaching and stipends;
- Academic coaching and clear educational pathways for students aimed at significantly increasing completion rates and time to certificate or degree;
- Expansion of CTE and Career Pathways programs that include coaching models and holistic supports for learners;
- Increased supports for disability services and accessible education resources; and
- Delivery of mental health services that has been declared a crisis for adolescents and an area where campuses are seeing an exponential demand.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request. We acknowledge the Herculean task before you and ask that you bear in mind the broad benefits to the State that result from investments in Oregon's postsecondary students.

Sincerely,



American Association of University Professors
Academic Freedom for a Free Society



ASSOCIATION OF OREGON FACULTIES



OREGON EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

