

Submitter: Daniel Rodriguez
On Behalf Of: University of Oregon
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chairs Sanchez and Steiner and members of the committee,

My name is Dan Rodriguez and I am a retired Eugene resident with 32 years of higher education experience. I know you have tough decisions to make this session and I appreciate your service to our state. I encourage you to support Oregon students' access to 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 spent more than 20 years as the Executive Director of the Alumni Association at University of Oregon. It was a great privilege to work with so many passionate alumni, who want to create community with one another and bring more Ducks into that community. We can't keep putting the needs of Oregon's public higher education students at the bottom of our list of priorities, if we want more young people to join our workforce with college degrees.

Obtaining a college degree can forever change one's life but for many, cost can be a barrier. An additional \$200 million to the Oregon Opportunity Grant can help break down those barriers for low- and middle-income students and those from underrepresented communities. Oregon already invests less than half of the national average in total financial aid per public university student.

I was deeply concerned to learn that Oregon ranks 45th in the country for per-student, state funding of public universities. As Oregon's students and workforce continue to face lasting impacts from the pandemic, we must do better!

Funding for Oregon's public universities creates opportunities for all Oregon students, and it is more critical now than ever. The state must 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. The current budget proposal will force cuts to these vital services and that is unacceptable.

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.

Respectfully,

Dan Rodriguez
Eugene, OR