

Testimony in support of HB 4162, the Student Emergency Needs Package  
House Higher Education Committee  
February 8, 2024

Chair Lively, Vice Chair Ruiz, Vice Chair McIntire, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Zoe Cooper-Caroselli, I work at Portland Community College as the program coordinator for Basic Needs Oregon, the statewide consortium of college benefits navigators. I am here today to speak in support of HB 4162: The Student Emergency Needs Package, which will make critical investments in basic needs programming and affordable textbooks for students across Oregon.

We know that basic needs insecurity impacts students' ability to focus on their studies and succeed in their educational goals, and that historically underrepresented students are disproportionately impacted. On campuses across the state, the benefits navigators are currently working to support student success by connecting students in need to resources and benefits. However, with the housing crisis in Oregon and food insecurity on the rise, community resources are often tapped to capacity, and many people with basic needs insecurity don't qualify for public benefits. This is where it becomes crucial that higher education institutions and benefits navigators have funding to put towards student basic needs.

In our recent reporting period, the two most common challenges that benefits navigators face in their role are 1) a lack of available resources in their community, which is especially common in rural areas, and 2) no funding to directly support students in need. This package would enable colleges and universities to strengthen their student basic needs programming and infrastructure by funding supports like vouchers to address need, emergency funds, and food pantry support. And it would empower benefits navigators to directly support students in a time when community resources are scarce.

Oregon students are working hard to build better futures for themselves and their families. I urge you to support them by supporting HB 4162. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Zoe Cooper-Caroselli

