

Chair Lively and members of the committee,

My name is Hunter Alan Hall, and I am the current Student Body President and Graduate Student at Western Oregon University. 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 across Oregon.

I grew up in SouthEast Portland for most of my childhood, and I remember school being one of the only places I could return to and feel safe. I was given shelter, food, and the fundamental knowledge I needed to be where I am today. Because of the teachers in my life who were there for me when I needed them and my single mother who was working full-time to support my sister and myself, I was able to graduate high school, attend Portland Community College, and after transfer with three associate degrees to Western, I graduated with my Bachelors in Mathematics while double minoring in Communication and Writing last June. Today, I am a graduate student studying the art of teaching, so to say education is important to me is an understatement.

During the seven years I have attended college, I have immersed myself entirely into leadership roles across the campuses I have studied, working in the student governments of PCC and WOU for three years each. In both instances, I worked toward representing my fellow students on the Campus, State, and National levels. I have been a part of many initiatives created by students, striving to enhance the college experience and address the various challenges our student body faces. Throughout these experiences, one issue consistently emerges as a barrier to student success: financial instability.

Far too often, students like myself struggle to meet their basic needs while pursuing higher education. The cost of living, tuition fees, and additional expenses such as textbooks can quickly accumulate, placing immense pressure on already tight budgets. As the Student Body President of Western Oregon University, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of financial strain on my peers. Many students are forced to choose between purchasing textbooks, paying rent, or buying groceries. These decisions should never be a reality for any student striving to better themselves through education.

HB 4162: The Student Emergency Needs Package presents a pivotal opportunity to alleviate some of these financial burdens and support the well-being of students across Oregon. By investing in basic needs programming, such as food pantries, housing assistance, and mental health services, this bill acknowledges the importance of addressing the holistic needs of students. At WOU, we currently are down to only two full-time counselors, the food pantry has had to shutter its doors twice a week due to insecurities, and the cost of rent continues to rise, as always.

In addition to supporting basic needs programming, HB 4162 offers a unique opportunity to address food insecurity and environmental sustainability through innovative initiatives like our community garden project. As part of this endeavor, surplus food from local food banks will supplement students' meals on campus. Students will then collect and compost any remaining food scraps, forming the foundation for nutrient-rich fertilizer to nourish our crops. By harnessing the potential of food waste in this manner, we combat hunger and reduce the environmental impact associated with food disposal. This closed-loop system exemplifies our commitment and creativity to sustainability and addressing food insecurity by transforming waste into a valuable resource that supports our community's students while reducing our carbon footprint.

Through initiatives like this, HB 4162 addresses immediate student needs and fosters a more sustainable and resilient community for generations to come. Investing in basic needs programming can create a healthier, more equitable future for all Oregonians. I urge the members of the House of Representatives to support HB 4162 and prioritize the well-being and success of Oregon's students. Investing in their basic needs and reducing financial barriers can empower students to thrive academically and contribute positively to our communities. Thank you for considering my testimony; I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to all of you today.