

2/8/2024

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

My name is Teresa Alonso Leon, I am a former legislator for HD 22 and a former Chair of the House Education Committee and former Chair of the Joint Task Force for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education. I am now working as a consultant representing one of my clients CAPACES Leadership institute who hired me to develop Oregon's first Community Advocacy group focused on underrepresented students in post secondary higher education. I am here 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.

In 2021, we passed HB 2590, a one-of-a-kind bill meant to create a task force that would have 8 legislators travel around the state and learn more about our underrepresented students attending our public institutions. In addition, the bill also required that our taskforce develop policies based on what we heard in respect to access, retention, graduation and entry into the workforce. In 2022 we implemented the bill and we created the task force.

Our Task Force members

- Chair Alonso Leon
- Senator Michael Dembrow
- Senator Rob Wagner
- Rep Ricki Ruiz
- Senator Findley
- Rep Mark Owens
- Rep Zika
- Sen Robinson
- Member ex-officio: Senator Lew Frederick

In partnership with the HECC, the Oregon Student Association, community partners, and our amazing LPRO and Capital tech teams, our task force visited or virtually visited 11 public institutions, both community colleges and universities. We heard from our underrepresented students, faculty, classified staff, community partners, education leaders and the broader community. We also had an opportunity to listen to students who were receiving a college education in our prison system.

After our site and virtual visits, we created three workgroups lead by members of our Taskforce. They focused on
Financial Aid and Affordability
Student Support and Wraparound services
And Systemic Accountability and Continuous improvement

We had full student participation in every workgroup, and they were critical in the policy ideas and recommendations that we developed. HB 4162 is a product of this work. In two of our workgroups the **Financial Aid and Affordability and the Student Support and Wraparound Services** provided many recommendations and policy proposal ideas. Both recognized that we needed to address financial barriers faced by underrepresented students, including the cost of attendance, housing, childcare and educational resources such as textbooks. We needed to help underrepresented students who faced additional barriers to completion, we needed to do the following:

- expand emergency and completion grants;
- expand access to low-cost open educational resources
- provide institutions with the resources to identify students in need of support;
- centralize and promote available support services on campuses;
- maintain benefits navigators on campuses;
- increase state support of institutional and community based student support programs; what HB 4163 aims to do.

I can attest to you, members of the Higher Education Committee, having met our students across the state and listened and viewed their testimony, what I can say is that our students are in need of more than scholarships. What most people don't understand is that our students are experiencing the same societal challenges we are having with housing and food insecurity, those who are parents are faced with childcare deserts and the high cost of childcare. And on top of all that, many are trying to survive by working multiple jobs to pay the high cost of living and going to school full-time, when they should be studying, we are asking our students to do the impossible. This is why HB 4162 is so critical, investing in our students means investing in Oregon's economy but our students can't wait for the next session, our students need your help now.

Thank you for your time, and I hope that I can count on your support of HB 4162: The Student Emergency Needs Package.