

February 17, 2025

Dear Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Ramesh Jasti, and I am a faculty member in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Oregon, as well as the Director of the Materials Science Institute at UO. I am writing in strong support of SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities, which provides critical funding for initiatives that help underrepresented students successfully transition into higher education. By offering an early start and essential resources, this program sets these students on a path to long-term success.

For the past two summers, I have led and developed a program called 'Catalyst,' which operates under the Strong Start umbrella at UO. Catalyst is a Summer Bridge program designed to provide incoming undergraduate students—particularly those with an interest in the chemical sciences—with hands-on learning experiences and mentorship. Chemistry is often referred to as the 'central science' because of its foundational role in connecting fields such as medicine, engineering, pharmaceuticals, and sustainability. Through immersive workshops, students in the Catalyst program explore fundamental chemistry concepts and see firsthand how these skills apply to real-world challenges, from drug discovery to nanotechnology. Just as importantly, they build a supportive community with fellow students and mentors, ensuring they enter their first year with confidence and a strong academic foundation.

As a faculty member in the sciences for the last 15 years, I have seen firsthand the unique challenges faced by students from underrepresented backgrounds—especially first-generation college students. Many of these students enter higher education at a disadvantage, and without structured support, they are more likely to struggle or leave science majors altogether. Programs like Strong Start and Catalyst bridge this gap, fostering diversity in the sciences and strengthening Oregon's future workforce. The students we invest in today will be the innovators, engineers, and scientists who power Oregon's economy tomorrow.

I urge you to continue supporting these programs and ensure that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to thrive.

Sincerely,

