

My name is Barrett Greenwalt, I'm a freshman at the University of Oregon, and a participant in the Summer Bridge Program that was funded by Strong Start. I am writing in support of SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities, which will continue funding for programs that help ease the transition to higher education by providing an early start and giving them access to additional resources.

As someone who is the youngest in my family, I've always been surrounded by siblings, cousins, family friends, and older guiding figures bustling around, which meant that moving out of my childhood home was my first time ever really being alone. I was scared of not making any friends, I was scared that I would isolate myself, and scared that I wouldn't succeed in my classes. The Summer Bridge program proved me wrong. On the first day, I met one of my best friends. There was this girl sitting at the same table who was talking about gene expression and epigenetics, and I just thought, "This girl is so cool, I have to go and talk to her." And I did! Over the course of Summer Bridge we connected faster than I would ever have expected, sharing stories about high school, childhood, and our dreams for the future. Within the first week, I had three new favorite people, who I still talk to daily. We bonded over the fun activities Summer Bridge offered, like whitewater rafting, gaming at an arcade, a beach trip, and many many science experiments. We have often joked that Summer Bridge chose us for a reason, that fate simply brought us together. Summer Bridge not only helped me connect with the students and peer leaders around me, but also facilitated my academic success throughout my first term. Summer Bridge equipped me with knowledge of the campus, tips for finding housing, and effective study techniques all of which have helped me succeed in my first year.

Please continue funding and expanding the Strong Start Program so that more students can benefit from its impactful services. Your leadership and commitment to education will help ensure that Oregon's public universities remain places of opportunity, inclusion, and achievement.

Thank you for your time, and I hope I can count on your support of SB 604, the Strong Start Program!

Sincerely,

Barrett Greenwalt, University of Oregon, Eugene