

Submitter: Henry Axon
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

My name is Henry Axon a student at the University of Oregon, and a peer leader and former 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 both a former participant and a peer leader in the Strong Start program, I have witnessed firsthand its transformative impact on students entering their first year of college. This program doesn't just prepare students academically—it builds confidence, fosters connections, and instills a sense of belonging that carries them through their college journey.

When I arrived at the University of Oregon for Strong Start, I was overwhelmed with uncertainty. As a physics major, I had spent the summer anxious about whether I could handle the rigors of college-level science. But from the moment the program began, I was surrounded by professors, graduate students, and peers who shared my passion. I went from not knowing what a physics PhD even did to engaging directly with researchers and learning the foundational skills of scientific inquiry. More importantly, Strong Start replaced my fear with excitement. By the end of the program, I had mentors, friends, research opportunities, and—most critically—the confidence to succeed.

As a peer leader, I have seen this transformation happen year after year. Students arrive nervous, often afraid to say goodbye to their families. By the end, that anxiety has turned into enthusiasm, a sense of purpose, and an understanding of the resources available to them—resources that many students never discover. Strong Start doesn't just help students survive their first year; it empowers them to thrive.

This program is an investment in student success, engagement, and the future of Oregon's academic community. Its impact is undeniable.

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,
Henry Axon
University of Oregon
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