

Submitter: Brian Montes

Committee: Joint Committee on Ways and Means, House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce Development

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB 2997

Chair Lieber, Chair Sanchez, Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, Smith, and members of the committee:

My name is Brian Montes, and I am a current graduate student at Portland State University, pursuing a Master's of Public Policy. However, today I write to you as a proud alum of TRIO at Portland State, and 2024 Last Mile Scholarship recipient.

TRIO and other student support organizations have helped me throughout all of the high points and low points of my undergraduate experience. Having them as a pillar of unwavering support is what ultimately allowed me to persevere and graduate. I can personally speak to the power that TRIO, and similar organizations across Oregon, have on the lives of first generation and historically underrepresented students like me.

That is why I strongly urge you to support HB 2997, which will establish a designated grant fund within HECC to support college access and success programs for underrepresented students in Oregon.

When I started my college journey, I did not know how I was going to be able to pull it off. As time passed, I faced extreme financial difficulties, having to balance a high cost of living, tuition, and private student loan payments. For the last two years of my undergrad, my dad had a couple of medical emergencies that meant that I could no longer rely on my family for any financial support. The opposite was true in that I had to step up and help my family in their time of need. What became an already stressful situation financially became worse, and had an impact on my ability to focus on academics, extracurriculars, and my professional career. I spent months not being able to meet my most basic needs. Things like buying toothpaste, finding a meal, or consistently being on the precipice of houselessness became the norm. At the darkest of times, my TRIO advisors were there to help me find resources, connect me with emergency funds, and advocate for me when I did not have the strength to.

As our nation faces a dark cloud of uncertainty with the future of education, it is imperative that Oregon and our local elected officials stand with our students, from pre-k to higher education, and beyond. With the attacks on the federal Department of

Education, the curtailing of DEI initiatives that empower, not damage, our students, and federal school funding being stripped from Oregon schools, Oregon must step up.

TRIO, alongside other college access and student success programs, are the first line of support for students. Students may not always feel comfortable or know where their university resources are, however, with TRIO and other like programs, students are met with supportive and resourceful advisors who stand with students from their first day in college, to their commencement. Programs like TRIO have helped countless students navigate financial aid, succeed academically, and persist to graduation. Without sustainable funding, many students will lose critical resources that support their college journey.

With all of the uncertainty and instability with federal funding for student support programs, HB 2997 will help provide the stability that Oregon students deserve. I know my story is not unique, especially among first generation students. Through that lived experience, I assure you that these essential student support programs are the lifeline that help first gen students succeed.

I strongly urge a vote in favor of HB 2997.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Brian Montes

