

Submitter: Laura Nitti  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Hello Co-chair Leiber, Co-chair Sanchez and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am the Benefits Navigator at Mt. Hood Community College and a member of Oregon Education Association. I am here today to speak in support of HB 3182 and 3183, the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act and HB 2669, Pay Parity for Part-Time Faculty.

I'd like to tell you a little bit about what I see every day in the Student Basic Needs Office and in our East County Community. Things are hard right now in a community so pressed thin for resources and everyone is preparing for worse to come. 3 in 5 of our students, a majority, are housing insecure or homeless. That number reflects thousands. I overhear students debating over the most recession-proof career fields as they prepare for an economy that continues to shift resources from workers and families to corporations and the powerful. My work feels like a tiny drop in the bucket. What helps me hold my head up is watching how our students overcome all kinds of adversity, often with the help of each other. In the Student Basic Needs office, we serve all students from the veteran student jumping through bureaucratic hoops to access the education funding they were promised to the asylum-seeking student scraping resources together to establish their educational equivalency and contribute their skills locally. Our students know that their well-being is intertwined. I watch them passionately working and volunteering at Barney's Pantry to get food to their classmates. They advise each other on how to navigate bureaucracies and stretch meager resources further. Daily, I see how students leverage a little into enough to share. Now, students need the same from you.

Over the last three years, state support has enabled us to leverage existing community resources, amounting to thousands of dollars of critical supports to students including housing, healthcare, and transportation. Without my role working to complete referrals or set up distribution processes, many of these resources would be inaccessible or unavailable entirely to students. My role, and those of my colleagues across the state, further enable us to advocate to make resources more accessible in the future and mitigate the discriminatory impacts of systemic problems. We collaborate with local non-profits to serve our students. Programs, like College Housing Northwest, have grown up around the Benefits Navigator role; establishing processes and relationships that would disintegrate without our designated staff positions. We also are in the best position to collaborate across campus with faculty and other part-time staff. Part-time faculty are often the first people students go to for help. But the holistic support they would like to offer to students comes at their own

expense. I need pay-parity for our part-time faculty so they can have the bandwidth to connect with our department so we can make sure they are ready to respond to students' needs. Just like the social fabrics our students create to help them get by, the programs that staff deliver only function together. As students and staff brace themselves for worse to come, now is not the time for Oregon to impose austerity budgets on our schools and the students, staff and faculty that uphold them.

While our students show us how to turn a little in to enough to share, I believe that Oregon actually has A LOT. You are the ones with the most agency to make sure that Oregon's wealth and resources are distributed fairly and your voters know it. Education, healthcare, and social service providers aren't here to compete for scraps when we know how you can raise revenues. Our students pursue their aspirations and confront hardship with compassion for each other, creativity and dignity every day. They deserve the same from you and I. Please support this vital work by voting for HB 3182, 3183 and 2669. Thank you for your time.