

Official Testimony in Support of HB 5006 — Funding for Benefits Navigators

Submitted by: William Wallace Morehead

Date: 03/18/2025

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is William Morehead, a graduate of Clackamas Community College and a current student at Portland State University. I am writing to express my strong support for **HB 5006**, specifically for the continued funding and expansion of the **Benefits Navigator** program, student affordable housing, and emergency relief funding structures for disadvantaged and underrepresented students across Oregon.

The Personal Impact of a Benefits Navigator

A few years ago, I was homeless, living out of my Jeep, working seasonal jobs, and barely surviving. College felt impossible. Complex systems, paperwork, and financial hurdles were stacked so high that trying seemed pointless. That changed when I was introduced to my **Benefits Navigator**, Helen Paz.

Helen became my bridge from poverty to purpose. She helped me navigate every system, program, and barrier that students like me have no clue how to engage with. Because of her, I was able to focus on what was needed to carve a path out of the impossible situation I was forced into. Every second of everyday demanded I fight or fall. With the support services I didn't even know existed. I was able to actually "be" in the classroom instead of just doing daily battle with the incessant obstacles there certainly never seemed to be any short fall of.

Today, I'm not just surviving — I'm thriving: I graduated from CCC with honors, 3.9 GPA Enrolled at PSU, was accepted into the Honors College and am poised for earning a career in PolySci/A.I.

Developing a **3D chess applications** to improve cognitive reasoning and extra-dimensional problem solving skills for future leaders.

Crafting hollow-bodied aluminum acoustic/electric guitars from scratch, an exploration in sound propagation physics

Writing a thesis addressing global crises, ethics, and systemic resilience

Architect of the SeCUREd crisis management system — a scalable, AI-driven platform designed to protect cities during natural disasters and large-scale emergencies, and the Trililiquary: an 4 dimensional phase shifted A.I. inference engine that is showing promise for a potential breakthrough in AGI and near human intelligent machines.

Every accomplishment above is a **direct byproduct of Oregon's investment** in me through **the Benefits Navigator** program.

Proof of ROI: My Work on Computational Math Reform

As a **small thank you**, and to demonstrate the ROI of investing in students like me, I want to share an additional byproduct of that support — my **Cost/Benefit Analysis on Computational Math Reform for Oregon**.

What started as personal research has evolved into a fully developed policy proposal that:

- Identifies **\$475 million in annual economic losses** due to STEM attrition
- Proposes a **one-time \$18 million investment** in computational math education reform
- Projects **net-positive gains of ~\$190 million within 5 years**
- Strengthens Oregon's position as a **national leader in progressive education reform**
- **Pays for itself after only 1 year provided only a 10% increase in STEM student retention**

This work — from the economic modeling to the policy framing — was made possible **only** because Oregon supported me when I needed it most. It is proof (if implemented) that **one supported student can generate statewide impact**.

Why Benefits Navigators Matter

The Benefits Navigator program:

- Converts system “costs” into **productive, tax-paying contributors**
- Captures lost potential from students who face poverty, homelessness, or other barriers
- **Increases student retention and degree completion**, especially for nontraditional students
- Multiplies Oregon's **economic and social return on investment** by unlocking human potential

My story isn't unique — it's what happens **every time** someone like Helen Paz is given the tools to help someone like me.

Final Thought: Your Investment Works

By supporting this program, you didn't just fund a service — you created a **pipeline for turning barriers into breakthroughs**. My education, my research, my inventions — all of it — is a **return on Oregon's investment** in one life. Now imagine the scale of that impact when this program is funded and expanded statewide. My Benefits Navigator opened the cap on my potential and transformed my life. While I am most certainly and sincerely grateful. I am also aware that the dollars must make sense. I hope this testimony demonstrates how investing in Oregon's students makes both dollars and sense

HB 5006 is more than a budget — it's a chance to keep building that return, one student at a time.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and for believing in programs that work.

Sincerely,

William Wallace Morehead

Portland State University Student | Poly-Sci/A.I. | CCC Graduate

wilmore@pdx.edu