

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

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

My name is Matt Bisek, and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon TRIO Association. I am writing in strong support of HB 2997-3, which will establish a designated grant fund within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to equitably distribute funding to community-based organizations that expand college access and success for historically underserved students.

HB 2997 builds upon the foundational work of the Joint Task Force on Underrepresented Students in Higher Education, created through HB 2590. The task force identified the systemic barriers faced by students from historically underserved backgrounds and provided a comprehensive definition of underrepresented students, which includes individuals from rural communities, low-income families, students with disabilities, those who have experienced the foster care system, LGBTQIA+ students, and undocumented individuals.

This bill is a direct continuation of that work—it transforms recommendations into action by establishing a sustainable, permanent grant fund to support the organizations best equipped to reach and serve these students.

On behalf of the nearly 12,000 TRIO students across Oregon, I urge you to support HB 2997 to ensure that low-income, first-generation, and underserved students continue to receive the resources and support they need to thrive in higher education.

For years, TRIO and similar programs have helped be a bridge for students navigating post-secondary education, provided financial aid & academic support, and expanded career readiness opportunities, yet these efforts have been funded inconsistently through one-time legislative appropriations the past four years (HB 5006 and HB 2412). HB 2997 seeks to correct this by creating a stable, dedicated grant fund, ensuring sustainable and equitable support for organizations serving Oregon's most vulnerable students.

HB 2997 Will Directly Support Students By:

- Establishing a permanent grant fund to eliminate the uncertainty of year-to-year budget negotiations and ensure long-term investment in college access programs.
- Expanding resources for organizations that help students persist and graduate, strengthening Oregon's workforce and economic future.
- Prioritizing funding for students most at risk of not completing college, including

those from rural areas, low-income backgrounds, and communities of color.

I have seen firsthand the transformative impact that TRIO and similar college access programs have on students. The Oregon TRIO Association has been actively working to expand the reach of federally funded TRIO programs into new schools and communities across the state—successfully securing 10 new programs to date, with dozens more applications currently pending. Thanks to the past support of this legislature, Oregon now receives over \$2.5 million in new funds (for a total of \$17 million) annually in TRIO grant funding. With continued investment, that number has the potential to grow significantly. HB 2997 is not only a vital step toward supporting our underserved students—it's also a smart, long-term investment in Oregon's communities, with education as the engine for transformation.

I urge the committee to support HB 2997-3 to ensure equitable, sustainable funding for programs that change lives and open doors to higher education. Thank you for your time and for prioritizing student success.

Sincerely,

Matt Bisek
Executive Director
Oregon TRIO Association