

Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Sanchez, and members of the Ways & Means Committee,

My name is Christy Walker (she, her, ella), I am the Dean of Equity and Well-Being at Central Oregon Community College, and I am here today to speak in support of HB 3182 and HB 3183, the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act.

Basic needs resources are essential in supporting students in a holistic people centered approach. We can no longer act as if what a student is experiencing outside of the classroom does not impact their student success. Forcing students to choose between feeding their families or going to class should not be a choice they have to make. The same goes for transportation, technology needs, dental issues, rent, medical assessments, and the list goes on. These programs are not new, and students depend on them.

Since its inception we have had over 6,000 visits to our Bend Campus food bank, and our branch campuses which are in more rural areas are in constant need. Hundreds of students have visited our clothing connection and around 50 students per term have gotten help through our Benefits Navigator partnership- and this is not including repeat students, students who are referred to other programs, one-time gas card recipients, or one time email contacts.

Providing resources for students in a dignified and respectful manner acknowledges their humanity and their right to education. I have several stories of how students have been positively impacted by these resources and more in reference to how they have experienced harm because of the lack of resources particularly in rural areas. Our rural students are just as deserving as all other students to have access to resources.

There is a student who struggled unnecessarily because access to the tribal grant came with barriers. There is another student who had to stop coming to school because they were houseless, and the bus would not allow them to bring their wagon with all their possessions. There is another student who had unexpected medical bills pile up on them that they were forced to make the decision between going to class or taking on more work to pay off their bill. The stories are endless, and we have an opportunity to help change these outcomes.

Basic needs resources at colleges, are not meant to be everything for everyone. What they are is a bridge. A glimmer of hope and an understanding for students that there are people who care about what happens to them. They are a chance for students to get the help they need to move forward.

At COCC, more than 60% of our students who receive financial aid are Pell eligible. This means that they display exceptional financial need. While financial aid is absolutely a blessing for those who qualify, it often does not address basic human necessity. It is crucial that we continue to support these programs. The students we serve are the students we count on to be the workforce of tomorrow. If we do not help them succeed, we all will be impacted. We can do this through support for HB 3182 and HB 3183, the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act.

Thank you