

To: Ways and Means Committee
State of Oregon

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Re: Funding for higher education/public education

Thank you for taking the time to review this testimony. I have lived in Oregon my entire life. I work at Eastern Oregon University. My mother was a school teacher, and I remember having pride in the fact that Oregon was ranked as one of the best school systems in the nation. I have watched as education has changed over decades. Change is expected, but it seems as though many of the changes have caused a great deal of harm. Oregon is now one of the worst school systems in the nation.

We need a strong education system to support our young Oregonians in their dreams, their ambitions and their goals. Nearly all employment opportunities that can provide a livable wage require some sort of post high school training. Yet funding to push our children to excel in K-12 and take the opportunity to advance their knowledge never seems to be sufficient. I have been having this conversation with public figures, including this committee, for years now. Every two years asking for the same thing. We need to fund education.

Higher education in particular has had a huge impact in my life. I started taking classes at the local community college, learning to play and perform classical guitar when I was 8 years old. I completed training to be a legal secretary at the same community college before I graduated from high school. I have attended a private college in Oregon and received my first bachelor's degree from that college. Lastly, I attended and graduated from Eastern Oregon University with my second bachelor degree. I will say that the education I received from EOU, a liberal arts style degree in science, held to the same standards as my liberal arts style degree in business administration from a private college.

Having a state university that can provide that standard of education at a more affordable cost is a massive asset to this state. Unfortunately, those of us who work at the small universities in Oregon hear on a regular basis that there isn't money to adequately staff the university, they can't afford to pay us COLA's that retain our buying power, we will need to tighten our belts again. Now, with the looming drop in enrollment, a drop that is expected to be temporary, cuts may come so deep that they negatively impact the education we are able to provide.

I am begging at this point. Please fund higher education through the “cliff” of low enrollments so that the students of our state can continue to grow and strive to achieve their dreams. It is time to make Oregon’s education system great again. The start of that process is recognizing the value of helping our students achieve all they can. It should never be considered a waste of money to invest in the leaders of tomorrow.

Thank you again for your time.

Jo Hickerson