

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

I am writing to testify in support of appropriating funds toward the following budget items:

- \$7-10M investment for Strong Start
- \$450M investment in the Oregon Opportunity Grant
- \$1.275B for the Public University Support Fund

I am a psychology professor at Western Oregon University. I am inspired so profoundly and often by the determination of undergraduate students who are dedicated to entering careers in mental health counseling and therapy, social work, and crisis management--all comprising a mental health workforce Oregon desperately needs. I will focus these comments on psychology students, though WOU's contribution to the Oregon workforce spans an array of important fields.

Many WOU students come from poor, minority, and first-generation student backgrounds, and struggle to afford tuition costs. They juggle school, internships and other experiential learning, (often full-time) work, and family caretaking responsibilities. But those are exactly the people the Oregon workforce needs. The state doesn't benefit when only a privileged class can afford to enter mental health and other caretaking fields, because clients in these fields often come from poor and minority backgrounds and benefit from receiving care from professionals who share that common ground. I can't stress enough that I am not merely advocating diversity for its own sake, rather, I am advocating for a diverse mental health workforce because that increases the quality of care available to Oregonians.

The proposed budget items will directly support retention of students who have all the determination, grit, intelligence, and skill needed to enter and enhance the workforce, and just need some extra support to get through the financial challenges of achieving an undergraduate degree. Thank you.