

Good morning, Ways and Means Co Chairs, Vice Chairs and Members of the Committee. For the record my name is Estela Dominguez-Calderon and I'm a senior at Gresham High School. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of House Bill 2997.

Before joining College Possible, I had a negative perception of higher education. I thought that college was unreachable and unaffordable for people like me: a first-generation Latina. I knew I wanted to pursue a professional career in engineering, but I was forced to ignore my academic goals.

Since I joined the program last year, I have been attending weekly sessions and diligently preparing for my near future. College Possible has helped me create a healthier mindset, and I realized that I do not have to pursue the career pathways often expected of the Hispanic community. However, being a daughter of immigrant farm-working parents is a part of my identity that I have learned to proudly embrace.

This program has been an immense support to me. With care, my College Possible mentors guided me through the college application process, checked in with me and helped me apply for scholarships. I will continue to have a mentor guiding me during my entire time in college.

At Gresham High School in addition to College Possible, I am a member of the National Honor Society, AVID, TRIO, Key Club, and the Latino Network Escalera Program. After high school, I am determined to attend a four-year university and pursue a career in industrial engineering. I seek to become part of the 9.4% of U.S. Latinos in the engineering workforce. This would help me accomplish my goal of increasing diversity and inclusion in engineering fields and academic institutions.

As a Hispanic and first-generation student, higher education is the only way to break through generational barriers. It opens many doors to opportunities and connections that would otherwise be inaccessible. It gives me the choice to pursue my dreams that I once labeled as "unreachable" due to my background. By providing students with personalized resources and guidance, programs like College Possible help students access this autonomy to shape their own futures.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you today and for considering House Bill 2997.