



Written Testimony in Support of SB 794: Oregon Student Parent Data Collection in Oregon's Public Post-Secondary Educational Institutions

On behalf of the Oregon Women's Equity Coalition (OWEC), a 57-member coalition of nonprofit and advocacy groups serving women and girls in Oregon, please accept this written testimony in support of SB 794, which addresses the need for more comprehensive data collection about the parenting status of students attending public post-secondary institutions.

Currently, Oregon lacks comprehensive data about how many student parents are enrolled in public colleges, universities, and community colleges across our state. Without this data it's impossible to get a full picture regarding the specific educational needs and outcomes of student parents. This is important to OWEC and the individuals and communities our member organizations serve because we are aware of the barriers to completing a college education for students who also have parenting responsibilities. While we lack specific data regarding the parenting status of post-secondary students in Oregon, national data tells us that:

- In the past decade the number of student parents has increased by more than 30%.
- Approximately 25% of current college students have dependent children.
- 53% of student parents will not complete a college degree, vs. 31% of nonparents.
- Low-income college students with children are 25% less likely to obtain a degree than low-income adults without children.

This is important to us because education is a game changer. Today it's nearly impossible to find a self-sustaining career that pays a living wage without some secondary education. Those with a college education earn more over a lifetime and have the greatest chance to build wealth. Those without access to a college education are often stuck in a generational cycle of poverty. Recent research indicates that a child born into a poor family is six times less likely to earn a college degree than one born into a higher income family. Parents who complete their college education, either before or while they are parenting their children, are essential role models for their children's own educational aspirations and success.

We are particularly concerned about the impact of low education attainment on women and girls. According to *Count Her In: A Report About Women and Girls in Oregon* commissioned by the Women's Foundation of Oregon, over one-third of Oregon's women and girls are struggling to make ends meet. We know that education is a pathway out of poverty. Oregon can, and must, do better to help struggling students who are also parenting meet their educational goals.

We believe that requiring public post-secondary institutions to identify whether a student is a parent on its demographic information forms is an essential first step in lowering educational barriers for parenting students and closing the educational achievement gap. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 794.

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