

Committee members,

I come to you as a non-traditional student who had no intentions of pursuing higher education just a few years ago. I was forced to step out of high school due to health complications and while I had every intention of completing my degree, life had other plans. In my ten year break from school I became a single mother at 21, working low-paying jobs in an effort to get by. I eventually met my now husband and we were fortunate to add two more children to our family, but it came at the cost of my health and nearly my life. Two months postpartum after the birth of my third child, I was a stay at home mom, feeling unfulfilled and without direction, and found myself in a position to continue my educational journey. I enrolled in the summer term of the Adult Basic Skills program which resulted in me obtaining my GED. Finding myself already on the Umpqua Community College campus following my final test, I walked into the Student Center and was warmly greeted by peer mentors who assisted me in enrolling and setting up an advisor meeting. Just three weeks later I attended my first college course during the Fall 2017 term.

I was determined to compensate for my unexceptional high school experience, and started reaching out to various institutions on campus: TRiO, clubs such as the Queer Students Advocacy, Student Life, and my peers. By the end of my freshman year, I had been asked to become a Peer Mentor, President of QSA and an officer of Debate Club for the upcoming school year, a 4.0 student with an invitation to the international honor society Phi Theta Kappa, and multiple scholarships for the 2019/2020 school year. This fall I will be pursuing my Bachelors at Portland State. I want to become a mental health counselor here in Oregon. I am one of four Oregon semi-finalists for the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer scholarship.

As you can imagine, this was not easy. My husband works nights over 40 hours a week, I have multiple health complications, and three children, one of whom is autistic. We make less than \$50,000 a year. I am fortunate to benefit from programs such as Pell Grants and the Oregon Opportunity grant, as well as an affordable education through UCC. But in my capacity as a peer Mentor, I have discovered that this is not the case for many. More than half of our student population consists of students over the age of 24, and the majority of them do not qualify for the Oregon Opportunity Grant, and close to half of our students are under the age of 24, meaning they must report their parent's income, regardless of whether or not they live at home. Outside of school, I know a great deal of students who work full time minimum wage jobs. Despite the comparatively low costs of community college, I know financial barriers prevent many from continuing or even pursuing higher education in the first place. The \$787 million proposed would provide many opportunities to students who, like me, seek to make Oregon a better place.

While my story is my own, but it is not uncommon. Returning to school helped me to find purpose and it completely changed my life and who I am fundamentally. Without access to community college, I would not have taken this step towards bettering my life and expanding my

knowledge. Many others like me would not be able to take this step. We are the future of Oregon and without an investment in our education and in the trades and certificate programs offered, what kind of message are we sending to the next generation in regards to their worth?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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