



April 18, 2019

Co-Chairs Roblan and Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Knopp and Smith and members of the Student Success Committee,

My name is Michele Ruffin and I am the Oregon Advocacy Manager for Forward Together. Forward Together works in Oregon and nationally to win rights, recognition and resources for all families. We work at the intersection of race, gender and sexuality—and are a women of color led organization making sure that all Oregon families have access to healthcare, recognition for their families, and live in safe communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Student Success Act today.

If the goal of our tax system is to benefit the top 1% of Oregonians, than our tax system is working exactly as intended. In our current tax system, Oregon’s poorest families pay more in taxes as a share of income than any other group of taxpayers in the state. They pay the highest state and local taxes, excise taxes, and property taxes as a share of family income than any other group.¹

So what does that mean? It means that our regressive tax and budget structure actually worsen racial and ethnic disparities because households of color are more likely to have lower incomes and less wealth than white households. The free ride we are giving corporations and the very wealthy in our state is on the backs of communities of color and low income Oregonians. That’s not fair—and it’s not in line with Oregon’s values.

The upside-down tax system we have affects every aspect of life in our state. From having the 6th largest class size in country to 30,000 kids in our state who can’t get into pre-K program due to

¹ Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax System in all 50 States. Institute On Taxation and Economic Policy, October 2018. <https://itep.org/whopays/>



cost—our tax policies aren't theoretical. The consequences are all too real for Oregon families. The end result is a both-and: our tax system both burdens women of color, transgender folks and indigenous communities the most and then it is these communities that are the most impacted by cuts to critical services.

Our current tax structure will require many different steps and solutions to address the racial and gender disparities it has built over the years. The proposed corporate activities tax is a big step in the right direction, raising much-needed revenue for Oregon students by asking more of corporations instead of Oregon families. And the Student Success Act will give Oregon schools the resources to address the needs of Black and Brown students, indigenous students, LGBTQ students, low income students, and students with disabilities.

I want to thank you for your time today, and urge you to please vote yes on the Student Success Act for students and all of our communities.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin
Oregon Advocacy Manager
Forward Together