

My name is Heather Griffith and I'm a University of Oregon alumna. I was also a first generation college student who had to get through school solely with the help of financial aid.

Financial aid needs reform, that's not in question. What needs to be decided is *how* to best serve our incoming students. When I attended the U of O, out of state tuition was at \$17,000, but when I recently checked it now stands at \$56,000, and in-state is nearly \$30,000. At this rate, my own daughter won't be able to attend my alma mater even though we live in Eugene! At the same time as prices have risen through the roof for the education all employers now demand people have, financial aid and services haven't kept up, leaving students vulnerable to predatory lending, private loans with high interest rates, and government loans for exorbitant amounts that they'll never be able to pay back. More needs to be done to further the educations of our children without putting them or their parents in crippling debt.

This problem is especially acute for BIPOC students and first generation students, whose families — through no fault of their own — don't have the resources to pay for a college education. They are more heavily targeted by private lenders who know these kids will do whatever they must to make the dream come true. This is my own experience. I took out whatever loans I had to in order to finish school. The numbers on the papers I signed were abstract, the interest rates meaningless, something to be dealt with down the road when I got that promised golden job. I graduated with \$50,000 in federal loans. I paid those loans for 20 years, making the minimum payment set up by my plan. My balance NEVER decreased. Ever. It stayed the same. The only way I was able to pay them off was when I sold my home and used the majority of the proceeds to finally get rid of them. We shove these papers at CHILDREN and ask them to make sense of it, to understand what they're signing and what it means when we know they can't. It doesn't matter. They'll default and ruin their chances for homes and jobs, or they'll pay and pay into a system that never reduces their balance. They can't even discharge student loans in bankruptcy, shackled to the things that probably made them bankrupt in the first place. It shouldn't be like this. We should and can do better, and I urge the committee to look into funding university education for in-state students the same way we fund grades K-12. If we expect them to have a degree just to get a job, then we should ensure they have them just as we ensure they have high school diplomas. It is an investment in our future that can only help us as these students go out into the world unburdened by debt and able to be active participants in the economy and housing markets.

Thank you.

Heather Griffith, FSAScot