

TO: Chair Alonso León and Members
Joint Task Force On Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education

FR: Joyce Lynn Garrett, PhD
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I am writing today as a member of the University Alumni Board of Directors, a former board member at Central Oregon Community College, and a retired Dean of the College of Education at Boise State University.

I submit this testimony because I have witnessed the impact of financial stress on student achievement and graduation. Students from underrepresented groups (first generation college students, persons of color, and those who live in poverty) feel the impact more than their affluent peers who come from homes where one or more parent is a graduate of a post-secondary program.

Students who receive financial aid and wrap around services, especially during their first two years of enrollment in higher education, are more likely to graduate and be successful in an ensuing career. The Oregon Opportunity Grant and student services that reflect and are responsive to the diverse student populations across Oregon's institutions are critical to assuring students graduate on time, with a viable degree, and opportunities for a successful career.

The Oregon Opportunity Grant is the largest state-funded, needs based source of financial aid for students in Oregon. Approximately 40,000 students receive OOG funds each year. On the other hand, funding limitations mean thousands of qualified students go unfunded. Some of them struggle and drop out, some take six or seven years to complete their programs of study, and still others never get the opportunity to matriculate.

With the rising costs of higher education, increased funding for the OOG is needed to assure students in lower- and middle-income families have the same opportunities as their more financially secure peers. Greater investments in the higher education system across Oregon will assure also students receive the necessary support to meet their diverse and individual needs.

Thank you for doing the critical work required to assure all qualified students in Oregon receive the support they need to attend and graduate from a post-secondary education program. Your commitment of time is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

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