

Madam chair, senators and representatives:

My name is Christopher Mahan and I am currently employed here at SOU as an academic advisor for the TRIO student support services program, I am an active commissioner for the Ashland Housing and Human Services Commission, and president elect for Oregon TRIO Association. For over 50 years, TRIO programs throughout the U.S. have been on the forefront of supporting under represented students when it comes to educational barriers. When I think of social justice programs in Oregon when it comes to equity, diversity and inclusion, I can think of no other successful program than TRIO. There are only 18 Oregon TRIO projects in our 2 or 4 year institutions and 47 if add the pre-college programs. As a first generation and low income student myself, I could not overcome the barriers to completing a degree had it not been for TRIO programs such as these.

This day is set aside to understand how to better support underrepresented students and so I would like to offer a few suggestions. When it comes to housing, many of our student households must earn somewhere between 16 to 25 dollars per hour on a 40 hour week just to afford rent in Ashland. In addition, while they qualify for pell grants and aid, most of that money goes toward their total expenses leaving with little money and funds to support themselves or their family. SOU is in a unique position with having several buildings and lands in its inventory while the city attempts to make housing more accessible and affordable. While both institutions are facing budget concerns, it would do well for the state to assist in Land trust or co-oping partnerships between the city of Ashland and SOU to build new housing near campus for its students and staff. Roughly 6400 commuters

drive to Ashland each day from Medford with a portion of those being students. One thought would be to offer quarterly or annual free bus passes to students with evening operations when transportation is a major concern while reducing the congestion and the climate impact it has. Reinvest in our classified staff with a relief package or increasing salaries that keeps them working in our institutions instead of retiring or leaving for the private sector. Allow waivers at all college programs including graduate programs for underrepresented students as the cost of applying is another barrier when you factor in specialized test, cost of applications, and the cost to apply to that school. Set direct funding toward colleges to provide more tutoring services and longer library hours especially on weekends, holidays, and before finals when underrepresented students need it the most during these times and breaks from work. Provide more hotspots and laptops for those living in rural communities that are taking online classes or in case another pandemic ensues. Encourage donations for a clothing pantry just as we have food pantries so that students can look their best when it comes to scholarship and job interviews. Reward colleges that participate in partnerships between city governments in the form of internships from universities, this could greatly reduce personal cost for city government operations while giving students the experience and credits needed. Continue to support the Oregon TRIO Association as you did last year in HB 5006 as we are using that money to fund underrepresented students who are out of aid and need direct access to funding in order to complete their degree with less than 45 credits remaining. As you are aware, about 80-90 percent of most TRIO federal projects are salary based and need extra funds to offset cost for college visits for our students and the ability to purchase books, calculators, and other college related expense our students need. With your help and approval, I have

no doubt that you will have an impact for future underrepresented students in post secondary education and higher education programs.