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Good morning Chair Alonzo Leon and members of the Joint Task Force on Unrepresented Students of Higher Education. For the record our names are Lynn Findley representing Senate District 30 and Mark Owens representing House District 60.

We have appreciated the opportunity to be involved with this work group visiting colleges and universities across Oregon. We were honored to listen to what our students and faculty had to share about their struggles and triumphs. Unfortunately, we cannot be in this meeting virtually as we are both traveling out of internet range today.

We would like to take some time to share some of our more detailed thoughts. First, the state of Oregon needs to address how underrepresented students in higher education can get the support services they need to effectively navigate higher education. We have way too many students that cannot figure out how to start their journey or cannot finish their journey. This is where the state needs to focus. As we traveled around the state of Oregon it became clear there are experts working on solutions at every higher education institute. These are the students themselves, parents, staff, and administrators who have been involved in continued efforts for a considerable amount of time.

Specifically, on this report we have some concerns the potential policies could die underneath its own weight. There are some very good policies and ideas but there are far too many without a prioritization or missing a path forward for the budgetary request that will be needed.

We were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to meet with some of those that are representing our students throughout this process this last week. They also expressed some frustration with the lack of prioritization of the policies we have received from our students. They brought forth five policies we think are important for our task force to review and consider the needs of the students in our colleges and universities. Of these five policies for consideration, we would like to mention only one would need a budgetary request.

Here is a brief outline of the five policies that were presented:

- **Open Education Resources Program Expansion**
  - Increasing funding to Open Oregon Educational Resources of 4.5 million dollars for the 2023-25 biennium.
  - Open Oregon Educational Resources to promote textbook affordability for community college and university students, and facilitates widespread adoption of open, low-cost, high-quality materials.
- **Students with Disabilities Statewide Committee**
  - Mandates the creation of a statewide Committee on Supporting Students with Disabilities in Oregon Higher Education. The committee will develop a statewide action plan to make higher education institutions more accessible, accommodating, and safe for disabled students.

- Higher Education Excused Absence Act
  - Requires every public university in the State of Oregon until the end of the 2023-24 academic year to publish a university-wide excused absence policy that provides students with a baseline of excused absences for sickness, mental health issues, and other emergencies.
  
- Comprehensive Orientation for All Students
  - Requires colleges and universities to provide resources at orientation for: (1) SNAP benefits training and food security resources, (2) housing and tenant support resources, (3) disability accommodations, (4) mental health counseling, (5) student legal services, and (6) financial aid literacy resources.
  
- Educational Debt Collection Practices Act
  - Prohibits the practice of transcript withholding and limits the practice of student class registration holds at institutions of higher education as debt collection practices.

If we could ask for one consideration of this task force today it would be to please take the time to consider these five student policies they have brought forth. Highlight them, prioritize them, and put them on a fast track for this next session, all five are buried in this document you have before you today.

Second, it is concerning we have not addressed the largest hurdle to higher education, the skyrocketing cost. Until we collectively figure this out college will become unavailable to most, with all the good work this group can do we cannot keep up with this escalating cost, we must figure out how to reduce the cost to education as it has outpaced the Consumer Price Index and most all other indexes. We would ask you ask yourself why this is the case.

Lastly as we stated above, we have good people in every higher education institute and great people currently on the outside trying to support our unrepresented students in higher education. Every institute is unique, just as the students who need our help. We cannot fall into the trap as legislators thinking with a few visits and some virtual meetings we have become the experts on these issues. The people on the ground currently doing the work and our students are the experts. We need to support the five policies listed above that came from our students then figure out how to get additional funds to the people and the programs that are currently doing good work and let them have some latitude to do more.

Thanks to those who let us be involved with this process and we look forward to listening and learning more.



Senator Lynn Findley  
Senate District 30



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