

Hello to the Education Committee,

My name is Theresa Mai and I am a student at Oregon State University.

I am here to ask you to join our students in supporting HB 2590, the Student Voice Bill.

This bill is all about making sure our colleges and universities work for all students and can help us graduate and get good paying jobs. Right now, our campuses aren't equipped to help everyone succeed. In my experience, when it came to my personal experience in higher education, I have always felt behind. Unlike my peers, my parents didn't go to college and several of my cousins were unable to complete college. Because of this, I didn't have the social capital and the knowledge needed to navigate the higher education system like my peers do. Oftentimes, I would find myself struggling to receive scholarships, find ways I could afford college, or get my career started because I don't have that rulebook my peers have. Fortunately, I was able to turn to the STEM Leaders program and the Educational Opportunities Program for help. These programs helped me navigate the obstacles I had and flourish beyond my original expectations of myself. In fact, I was able to receive enough scholarships to graduate debt free as a low-income, first generation student! Knowing this, I believe my story is one example of why it is so important to have a focus on increased access to higher education. For a long time, higher education has posed itself as an agent of change, yet this is not the case for every student that walks through the door, especially those from historically underserved communities.

If I could envision a campus that was fully accessible to my needs as a student, I would imagine it as a place that understands that our needs vary. Some may need help with basic needs, such as housing or food insecurity. Others may need help with guidance through their education, career, and beyond, especially for those who have never seen themselves in college or in their field. Understanding this, I believe we need colleges and universities that offer a variety of services that meet where each student's needs are. There are many students with many different needs being met. This bill can help change that by creating a special committee to tour our campuses and look at what is working, and what is not working. This process would create an opportunity for students like me to be heard, that's why it is so important that you vote yes.

We really need to get college right in Oregon, because the future of our economy depends on it. The Oregon Employment Department projects that between 2019-2029, occupations that require higher levels of education for entry will grow fastest.

Please remember my story when you vote on this bill, and please join me in supporting HB 2590.

Thank you for your time,
Theresa Mai