



Emily Wanous

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Dear Chair Alonso Leon and members of the House Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Emily Wanous and I am the Legislative Director for the Oregon Student Association. I am here today in support of HB2590, which would establish a task force focused on supporting the success of underrepresented students in higher education. This work is both urgent and necessary if Oregon is committed to adapting to the evolving student body, and with that, their changing needs.

Due to systemic and institutionalized racism, our societal systems we work within are rooted and built on injustices. In the case of postsecondary education, these trends manifest in the form of large gaps in services, programs, and support for our Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color. According to the most recent HECC statewide snapshot, **Oregon's completion rates for Black students are 15% lower than their white counterparts** (Black students at 41% and white students at 56%). A task force, such as the one this bill would create, would highlight where the obstacles and deficits are that are responsible for such disparities.

In addition, 60% of students at universities and 32% of students at community colleges were unable to meet expenses of their college degree. Affordability and access concerns are extremely common in our rural areas of the State. With rural campuses, such as Treasure Valley Community College and Blue Mountain Community College, all having higher rates of students receiving need-based financial aid than the statewide average.

Recognizing you all as decision makers, you are aware of the power of research and information in making decisions. Without understanding where and how such disparities are happening, it is difficult to create solutions that will successfully respond to the problem. This comprehensive approach, led by Rep. Alonso Leon, is the first step in not only recognizing the problems our students face, but in taking action to better the lives of our students.

Thank you for your time and **I urge your yes vote on HB2590.**