

March 18, 2021

Oregon House Education Committee  
900 Court Street, NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 2412, -2 Amendments

Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the House Education Committee,

I'm writing to urge your support and adoption of the -2 amendments to HB 2412. This amendment includes funding for five different college access programs that were funded in the Governors Recommend Budget. These five programs provide valuable access and supports for low-income and historically underserved students to help them to achieve their post-secondary goals.

I first applied to this program in fall of 2015 as a PCC student. I had come from living in project housing throughout the San Francisco Bay Area to living in Portland at the time and my understanding of higher education was non-existent. To add to the adversity I was working through, I had been hit by a car while crossing in a lit crosswalk my first term at PCC. The injuries I sustained to my brain were nearly fatal and left me with lifelong cognitive disabilities. However, I fought for my rehabilitation and got myself back into school knowing that nothing would stop me from the career I was passionate about.

With my newfound neuro-deficits, I was desperately trying to figure out school as an inexperienced and disabled student. When I got into the NIH BUILD EXITO program, I was given so much more than just guidance. The mentors I was paired with really took me under their wing and gave me a chance at feeling like I really belonged not just in academia and research, but in the career that I had initially began school to become a professional in. The research and networking skills BUILD EXITO helped me to develop have been priceless to my professional and educational growth.

I now work as a lead clinical research coordinator for the research lab BUILD EXITO paired me with, OHSU's Trauma Research Lab, and am a mentor for current scholars in the program. As a lead coordinator, I work alongside the trauma team that had saved my life during my 7 day stay in the same ICU, conducting clinical trauma and COVID research as well as running patient care blood assays. I have been able to transition from mentee to mentor while helping current BUILD EXITO scholars overcome the many challenges that they may be presented with in their own paths towards their very own biomedical careers.

Without BUILD EXITO, I do not feel I would have been able to graduate with my Bachelor's, or already be working in a professional career while applying to medical school. This program helps underrepresented students overcome the almost impossible barriers that come with a lack of representation in not just biomedical careers, but in college of any level. I strongly urge the passing of this funding for the program. Diversity in STEM must become a priority, and these programs are an invaluable step in the right direction.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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