

Hello Chair Alonso Leon, Cochairs Neron and Weber, and members of the committee,

My name is Andrew Rogers and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Student Association.

I am here to testify in support of HB 2093, and in support of the amendments being considered for this bill as well.

The college students who lead OSA have determined financial aid access and investment to be a top priority this legislative session. You will hear from some students today, and please note that if this hearing was not occurring during spring break, you would likely have a lot more supportive students testifying today.

With the covid-19 pandemic exacerbating the existing crisis of food insecurity and housing insecurity among college students, skyrocketing tuition and textbook costs, we know that this state is losing a huge opportunity by continuing to allow so many Oregonians to be priced out of higher education.

The Oregon Promise Program has been an innovative program for ensuring access to community colleges in Oregon. Now it is time to ensure this Program helps students earn four year degrees as well. The changes being made through this legislation are the result of a sound and thorough process of engagement between the HECC, students, and other stakeholders. I want to thank the HECC and all other stakeholders who have worked on assessing and envisioning a future for financial aid in Oregon.

While we support this bill and the proposed amendments, we also wish that the state was in a political and financial place to make even bigger strides in higher education affordability. One example of the things we hope to work on in the future is changing the Oregon Promise from a last-dollar in program to a first-dollar in program. What I mean by that is right now, this program will take into account other grants and aid a student receives, meaning that a student gets effectively penalized for having a higher need, and gets less support from Oregon Promise if they receive other aid such as Oregon Opportunity Grant and Pell. A first-dollar in program would not penalize students for receiving other aid, which would ensure the highest need students are getting the maximum impact from this grant. This bill does not address that issue, and we realize that is because of the financial impact it would take from this state. Underfunding for higher education and financial aid access continues to leave too many Oregon students behind.

That being said, HB 2093 is a very low cost way to begin progress towards better financial aid options in Oregon. By helping students access aid to complete both 2 year and four year degrees, this bill helps move Oregon towards the more equitable and prosperous future that students want.

Thank you for your consideration,

Andrew Rogers
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