



April 5, 2021

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

Dear Chair Michael Dembrow and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee:

As presidents of Portland State University, Portland Community College and Mount Hood Community College we know all too well the challenges our students face while completing their education. Amongst these many obstacles, is the formidable truth of the rising housing crisis and lack of affordable access for our students. We speak in unity for full support of Senate Bill 851 as it helps all of us by directly funding the subservient non-profit organizations that target students who are experiencing houselessness or at a high risk of homelessness.

In 2019, there were over 100,000 students enrolled in Portland area colleges. 20% of the Oregon community college students experienced houselessness while over half identified as housing insecure. Portland Community College saw 14% of their students dealing with houselessness and another 40% experiencing housing insecurity. 1 in 5 students at Mt. Hood Community College students experienced houselessness with more than half of the student body experiencing housing insecurity during the past year. 16.1% of PSU students also experienced homelessness in the same period. Since COVID-19, a smaller sample size of participants showed us that 64.5% of PSU students are experiencing housing insecurity during the pandemic and 20.5% of students experienced houselessness. We are also still seeing BIPOC students in the highest percentile of those struggling to obtain necessities like affordable housing.

The cost of not supporting students in overcoming this basic need is tenfold, as we know that students who struggle with houselessness insecurities are directly affected in their studies. Students are more than ten times more likely to fail courses or withdraw all together and their overall GPA also suffers. These barriers continue to inhibit these underserved student's pathways to access higher education and to ultimately earn their degrees.

College Housing Northwest has been a great contributor and non-profit leader in paving the way to actually attaining our joint mission to solving this problem. They help provide affordable and convenient housing options to post-secondary students. Currently, there is a coordinated effort known as the Affordable Rents for College Students (ARCS), which is a cooperative venture with the College Housing Northwest and PSU, MHCC, PCC and New Avenues for Youth to provide 50 percent reduced rent to qualified students. It is with these continued efforts and partnerships that we hope to grow and increase the reach to all students in the state of Oregon that find themselves unable to have a home while attending college.

It goes without saying that the pandemic is still very much here and there is still more work that needs to be done. We all collectively believe it is possible to achieve affordable housing for all our students, but we must first tend to those that are experiencing houselessness and extremely burdened by the lack of adequate housing affordability. There are many people and organizations behind this ambitious effort and PSU, PCC and MHCC stand behind SB 851 which will allow more funding and support to the most vulnerable students in our state. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Stephen Percy, President  
Portland State University

Mark Mitsui, President  
Portland Community College

Lisa Skari, President  
Mt Hood Community College