

Good afternoon, it is a great pleasure to be on video with all of you today. My name is Victor Mena, I'm from Beaverton, and after being in Washington, DC for the last 5 years I am glad to be back. I am thrilled to recognize several of you, for example I have known Representative Alonso Leon and Senator Dembrow since my time at Portland Community College.

As a first generation American, high school and college graduate, and Dreamer I want to start by stating how grateful I am for all of your work on higher education. I would not be where I am today, without Portland Community College and Portland State University.

Since we left Mexico in the early 1990s, my family and I have been blessed to call Oregon home. Like many Oregonians before us, my father immigrated here thousands of miles from his homeland in search of a better life for him and his kids. Despite his 2nd grade education, he understands the positive long-term impacts of an education and has always encouraged my siblings and I to figure out a way to graduate from high school and beyond.

As the oldest of 9 siblings I had to pioneer the way to higher education to the best of my ability. My public education started with the head start program, I attended Barnes Elementary and graduated from Sunset High School. I don't have to tell you all that this is the point [post high school] where pursuing higher education becomes complicated for all Oregonians, but it is especially difficult for Dreamers like myself.

As a child I was under the impression that I was born in Saint Vincent's hospital, since that is where all my other siblings were born. Reality hit me hard while I was at Sunset, I was born in Mexico. But after recovering from what I thought was the end of my lifelong goal to go to college and join the FBI, I enrolled at Portland Community College (PCC) to meet that objective.

It was at PCC when I started to meet with legislators in Salem and along with other Dreamers across the State advocated for the Oregon Tuition Equity and policies that incentivized affordable higher education. Such as the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG).

After PCC I dual enrolled at Portland State University and graduated with a bachelor's in criminal justice. My trajectory to obtaining a bachelor's degree would have been almost impossible without the financial aid I received through the Diversity Scholarship at Portland State. All Oregonians, including DACA recipients, have a right to receive a university degree and the opportunity to transform their own lives and serve our community through compelling civic action.

This summer I am set to obtain a Master of Arts in Defense and Strategic Studies degree, with the U.S. Naval War College.

I can confidently say that my Oregon Public Education, has changed my life and my family's life for generations to come. Further than that, my education has benefited Oregon as a whole. Today, I'm a proud public servant earning well above the average salary, as financial specialist for the Third Branch of Government. Oregonians invested in me, and today I am contributing back. This is why I urge our legislature to continue and increase that investment... it is well worth it.

Similar to the scholarships I received at PSU, the OOG may not alleviate all of the hardship of paying for college, but it does have an impact to get our students to the graduation ceremony. Expanding the OOG funding wise and for all Oregonians is the best way to open doors for our students to pursue the trajectory I have benefited from.

Within the next month (fingers crossed), I am looking forward to being sworn in as a US Citizen which will further reinforce the investment Oregon made towards my education. My trajectory and contributions to our state and country will only get better from here.

Supporting programs like tuition equity, keeping a university degree affordable through adequate state funding, and, most importantly, strong investments in need-based grants like the Oregon Opportunity Grant are essential to keep our colleges and universities affordable.

I commend and thank Oregon State legislators for supporting higher education affordability for all Oregonians. Thank you.