



Oregon State Legislature  
Joint Committee on Ways & Means  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301  
Via Email Only

April 21, 2021

Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward and Rayfield, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your service to the State of Oregon. There is no doubt that this session is unlike any other you have experienced. And yet, I imagine there is some familiarity to the work as you again contemplate complicated issues of state funding for education in Oregon.

In that vein, I write today in support of a robust investment in public higher education, specifically the Public University Support Fund (PUSF) and the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG), which you will hopefully fund at \$900 million and \$200 million, respectively.

As a faculty member at the University of Oregon and a parent with young children, I worry deeply about the future of public higher education in Oregon if we—as a state—do not increase our collective investment in these institutions and programs.

At the UO I wear many hats. I am a teacher who works with both undergraduate and graduate students. I am a scholar who researches complex questions relating to early childhood development and mental health. I am also department head, institute director, and governing board trustee. Through each of these lenses I see the stark difference between higher education investments made by other states and those made here in Oregon (ours are much, much lower), and I worry about the long-term impact of that disparity on our children, our communities, and our future.

I understand that there are competing demands for limited state resources, but hope you will consider just a few key points as you weigh various budgetary requests.

- The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities for BIPOC, lower-income, and rural students. It is critical that colleges and universities have adequate resources to address these disparities and ensure that all students have access to opportunity.

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- Services provided by universities have changed throughout the years. With more and more BIPOC and first generation students entering college, we have to think more diligently about how best to ensure they are successful once here. In addition, college students today have greater mental health needs than ever before. Our work to support students after arrival doesn't just need to be maintained, it needs to expand...and that takes resources.
- Our public universities and colleges have played an important role in addressing the pandemic, just as they do in solving local and global challenges of all sorts. Lower funding levels would challenge our ability to continue providing the fast, efficient, and accurate research and testing required to ensure our state's equitable recovery. (At risk of self-promotion, I offer the example of my own work on COVID-19 and Autism: <https://around.uoregon.edu/coronavirus-experts>.)
- Approximately 40,000 students receive Oregon Opportunity Grants each year, which can often be the difference between a student having the resources to go to college or not. However, funding limitations mean that the grant is *not* available to thousands of students who demonstrate significant financial need.

This request is not made lightly. As someone who spends every day thinking about how to improve the lives of children in the earliest stages of their development I know that education is a significant investment over a multi-year continuum. My hope is that you will recognize the value of the latter stages of that continuum and modestly increase your investment in both the PUSF and OOG in alignment with the request of Oregon's public university community.

Sincerely,



Laura Lee McIntyre, PhD  
Professor of School Psychology  
Department Head, Special Education and Clinical Sciences  
University of Oregon College of Education

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