

April 21, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner-Hayward, and Rayfield, Co-Vice Chairs, and members of the committee,

I am reaching out to request your support for **HB 2835**, the Benefits Navigator bill. I am professional staff at Portland State University supervising the PSU Food Pantry and am a resident of Cathedral Park neighborhood in Portland.

As you probably know, organizations like Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon are emphasizing college student insecurity for this biennium because the rates of college student food insecurity are **more than three times higher than for the average population**. Can you imagine a **nearly 1 in 2 likelihood of being food insecure** and still making that sacrifice for several years in order to get a college degree? At Portland State, **2 in 3 Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), and LGBTQIA+ students** have reported food insecurity. It truly is not the same landscape as when we went to college.

I am reaching out again as this bill continues to advance through the Ways and Means committee this week because I've heard that the bill is being considered for funding only one campus navigator as a pilot program. I understand the potential fiscal rationale for a less significant investment, but several things to consider are:

- **Funding HB 2835 leverages federal dollars from SNAP and other social service benefit programs.** The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported in December 2018 that 57% of college students who likely met the requirements for receiving SNAP benefits were not doing so.
- **Funding HB 2835 should improve persistence and retention, which leverages millions of university/college dollars.** If students are less likely to drop out due to not being able to meet their basic needs, colleges and universities may struggle less to retain students.
- **Funding HB 2835 is an investment in equity.** The students most impacted by food insecurity are BIPOC and LGBTQIA+.
- **Funding HB 2835 is an investment in Oregonians' resilience.** Research shows that food insecurity is correlated with trauma and that those who have experienced trauma are more likely to be food insecure. Additionally, the trauma of food insecurity has been shown to have intergenerational effects. Reducing the likelihood of college student food insecurity is a trauma-informed decision.
- **We already know this model works.** Benefits Navigator and similar roles are being utilized in healthcare, disability services, and public/community health. In large part, the social work profession exists because of this model. By funding a pilot, you're really just asking universities and Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon to jump through extra hoops to prove the efficacy of a model that is known to be effective.

- **How do you choose just one campus?** Someone will have to choose on which campus to put a Benefits Navigator for the pilot. Pilot data from somewhere like SOU or PSU may not be generalizable to other campuses. Also, OSU already has someone who does this type of work. If chosen for the pilot, would they get to add a second staff while campuses go without?
- **Not fully funding the bill is like kicking the can down the road.** In two years, do we really expect the budget decisions to be any easier in order to fully fund these positions on all campuses? College student food insecurity seems to only be growing in the past decade, so without a significant investment that address the cost of higher education, this problem isn't going away.
- **Supporting college students in this biennium is extra important.** As the economy continues to recover from the pandemic, college students will have a harder time finding work because the job market will be flooded with people who have more experience and education.

I greatly appreciate your service and consideration of supporting this bill.

Best regards,  
Angela Hamilton  
Portland, District 3