

Good evening Chairs Rayfield, Johnson, and Steiner Hayward and members of the committee,

My name is Susan and I am a 3rd-year student at Portland State University working towards a degree in International Studies. Today I am asking for you to invest in Oregon's students by putting priority funding towards higher education, HB 2590, also known as the Student Voice Bill, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant, the state's largest need-based financial aid program.

I am a Pell Grant recipient, and someone, by definition, is qualified for the Oregon Opportunity Grant yet does not receive it. While I am managing alright for the last three years of attending college, it has not been comfortable. Throughout my time in college, I have had to balance both school and work in order to pay for my classes as well as other living expenses; this obviously would put me at a disadvantage compared to a person who receives adequate funding for their schooling, hence is able to put their full attention into their school work. This issue also creates a lot of stress for myself, where I have to make certain sacrifices (such as not being able to afford to drive to school, nor live near the school because of costs so I have to commute 2+ hours to and back from school; or having to always live frugally in order to pay for my schooling) in order to afford school AND have some money for savings and other needs. In fact, I have always wanted to study abroad during my time in college. However, as I am approaching my final year of my undergrad, it seems that it is something unattainable due to the cost; this can be a major disadvantage to me and those similar to myself, as we are missing out on learning experiences that are inherently designed for only those who are able to afford it.

Over ¾ of Oregon students who qualify for and need the Oregon Opportunity Grant do not receive it, purely due to severe underfunding. Many students like myself whose college careers are determined by how much funding we receive, therefore the fact that this grant is underfunded puts many students stricken by financials at a major disadvantage.

Additionally, Oregon spends about 30% less per student on state financial aid than the national average while leading states spend two to four times as much per student as Oregon. If we choose to invest more into higher education, that would mean more students will not have to choose between going to college or having food on the table. Higher funding will help eliminate the barriers that have historically kept many marginalized students from being able to attain a degree.

I want you to also think of students of color, first-generation students, low-income, houseless students; college looks like a whole different ball game when it comes to folks of these identities. Therefore, I believe that with more funding, many marginalized students will finally be able to have the opportunity to attend higher education without worrying about its costs. I want to also urge you to take a closer look at the Student Voice Bill, as the bill will allow underrepresented voices to be directly heard by lawmakers; by not taking this bill seriously, the voices of the underrepresented will be further silenced, laws and budgets will continue to be passed without consideration to populations who need it most. If we as a state want to talk about "inclusivity" in terms of college accessibility, we need to first address how to make it affordable to ALL students as well as listening to their concerns.

I hope that you will remember my story, which can represent some of the students who are burdened with the same problems as I am; those who are passionate about receiving higher education yet face one too many obstacles on their path. Please keep us in mind as you work with your colleagues to set the budget, and please invest Oregon's money into higher education, the Student Voice Bill, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant for the marginalized students of our state and for