



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:

We write today respectfully requesting that you support robust investments in public higher education for the 2021-23 biennium, including \$900 million for the Public University Support Fund (PUSF) and \$200 million for the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG).

Public higher education is an integral thread in the fabric of our communities. For many, obtaining a degree can forever change one's life. Beyond the direct benefits to our students, public universities also strengthen communities, produce research aimed at solving important local and global challenges, and generate billions of dollars in economic impact.¹ Oregon's public universities have played an important role addressing the pandemic, from testing and tracing to researching psychological and physiological impacts.

Yet, for many, cost can be a barrier to entry even with tremendous skill, ability, and desire. Expanding the OOG program can help break down that barrier for even more Oregon youth. It will supplement the many millions of dollars individual institutions put into aid already, including the PathwayOregon program, which covers tuition and mandatory fees for qualified, Pell-eligible Oregonians. In many cases OOG support is not just helpful, but is necessary to create opportunity, especially for first-generation students, low- and middle-income students, and students from underrepresented communities.

Thinking beyond just student aid, general support for public higher education through the PUSF is imperative to access, quality, and success—helping students not just in *getting to* college, but in *succeeding* once there. Unfortunately, Oregon ranks 36th in the nation in per student higher education funding with a rate that is 25% *below* the national average.² When it comes to educating the future, we do not believe that mediocre—or below average—funding is good enough.

In our work leading the UO board these past several years, we engage with students, faculty, and staff from across the institution to hear directly about challenges and opportunities. We spend hours poring over financial information with a constant eye toward mitigating cost increases while providing necessary, high quality academic instruction and student services. We study best practices of our peer institutions. We both have grandchildren attending the school, and we both contribute

¹ <https://www.uoregon.edu/impact>

² State Higher Education Executive Officers report on State Higher Education Finance (November 2020); accessed April 20, 2021; available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/indicators/states/indicator/state-support-for-higher-education-per-fte-student/table>.

philanthropically to support students and programming. We have tremendous pride in the University of Oregon, our alma mater, and we believe Oregon deserves high quality public universities.

The past year brought political turmoil, severe wildfire, and untold pandemic-induced physical, psychological and economic damage. As we work together to rebuild and recover, please consider investing in Oregon's future by increasing your support for the PUSF and the OOG.

Sincerely,



Charles M. Lillis, PhD '72
Chair, Board of Trustees



Ginevra Ralph '83, MA '85
Vice Chair, Board of Trustees