

Honorable Co-Chairs and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you tonight. My name is Julia Betts, and I am the Coordinator of the STEM Center at Portland Community College's Southeast Campus. I appear before you to urge you to fund Oregon's community colleges at the highest level possible.

As I'm sure you're aware, "STEM" stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. STEM is a major area of focus for PCC and our sister institutions around Oregon for a simple reason: Strong skills in these areas are a prerequisite for so many good-paying careers in the 21st-century economy, as well as an important bridge to more advanced studies at four-year institutions.

At the Southeast Campus STEM Center, we provide students support in their STEM-related studies in the form of tutoring in subjects like math, chemistry, and physics; through mentoring; and through informal peer study groups, which have proven to be a very popular and effective way of helping our students to master their material.

Perhaps more importantly, the STEM Center helps connect students with the wilder world of research and innovation. We bring researchers to school to teach students about the finer points of their work, and to help students with their own projects and methods. We're also a member of the Oregon Space Grant Consortium, through which a number of our students have received grants to carry out their own research projects.

To give you just one example of what I'm talking about -- one of our students came to us as a former high-school dropout, and they are now co-enrolled at Portland State University working toward dual bachelor's degrees in Geology and Mathematics. They were a recipient of a research grant from the Space Grant Consortium, and they now work with us as a mentor for up-and-coming STEM students.

But our work at the STEM Center doesn't end with PCC students. We also work with the K-12 system to provide after-school workshops for younger students, and we partner with community organizations to expose local kids to the world of STEM and to plant the seed of one day pursuing a career in science, technology, engineering, and math.

And there's another aspect of our work that I believe is incredibly important, and that's the way in which we actively work to diversify the ranks of STEM students. STEM careers have been historically dominated by men, and in particular by white men. We reach out to students from traditionally underserved communities to show them that they have a place in the world of science and technology, and we support them to make sure they succeed in their studies to the fullest extent of their abilities. In this way, we are working deliberately to uphold PCC's commitment to equitable student success, as well as striving to make the professional STEM world more diverse and welcoming to people of all backgrounds.

It's important for you, the members of the Oregon Legislature, to hear about this, because our ability to do these things depends on the resources we have available to us. A well-funded Community College Support Fund would enable us to continue, and even expand, our efforts to expose students to STEM-related studies, support them academically and socially, bring STEM education to young people in the community, and, ultimately, start students on the path to becoming Oregon's next generation of scientists, researchers, engineers, technicians, and healers.

I call on you to fund Oregon's community college system as strongly as possible. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you tonight.