

Honorable Co-Chairs, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you tonight. My name is Tom Farrenkopf, and I am the Director of Legislative Affairs for the Associated Students of Portland Community College, Cascade Campus. I am here tonight to ask your support for House Bill 2835, the Benefits Navigator Bill.

By placing a full-time Benefits Navigator on every college campus in Oregon, community colleges and universities, HB 2835 would mean the difference between success and failure for literally tens of thousands of students every year. A benefits navigator would connect students with the range of federal, state, local, and institutional support services available to them, but which too often go unused because students struggle with the processes necessary to obtain them, or because they don't know the services exist in the first place.

When you're not familiar with a college campus, it can be a lonely and intimidating place. This is particularly true at institutions community colleges, not for lack of effort by my college, but because CCs are where so many students are the first members of their families to go to college, or who hail from traditionally underserved communities. We know that the number one reason that our students drop out is because life gets in the way. But if there was someone who could help to plug students in to the web of support that exists for them, it can make the difference between staying in school -- or not.

A benefits navigator can help students make sure that they have food on the table; know how and where to find tutors and other academic support; get discounted transit passes; connect with community organizations; get involved in student clubs; apply for government benefits; or simply know where they can find comfort among others with similar identities or backgrounds.

I urge you to vote YES on House Bill 2835, and YES on its Senate counterpart. An investment in Benefits Navigators on Oregon's college campuses will pay us back for generations to come in the form of a better-educated, more prosperous, more equitable Oregon. Thank you for your time.