

Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner-Hayward, Rayfield and Members of the Committee:

My name is Awab Al-Rawe and I live in Eugene. In my day job, I work as an Ombudsperson for the Oregon Health Authority, but today I am here in my capacity as a proud graduate of the University of Oregon, and member of the University of Oregon Alumni Association Board of Directors. I respectfully request that you support robust investments in public higher education, including funding the Public University Support Fund at \$900 million, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant at \$200 million.

Oregon's public colleges and universities play an important role in supporting our local, state, national, and international communities. I was born and raised in Baghdad, Iraq. Due to the war in 2003, my family and I became refugees in Syria and the chances to pursue higher education are next to none. I hadn't heard of Eugene or Oregon but with the help of two Americans who started an NGO in Syria, I was encouraged to apply to the University of Oregon. In 2009, I moved to the US and started my education at the UO. I earned my BA in International Studies and my MS in Conflict and Dispute Resolution. My ability to get education at the University of Oregon was life changing, and allowed me to start my career in public service in the United States.

As a refugee, asylee, and immigrant who lived through war and witnessed significant trauma, the opportunity to study in Oregon gave me a chance to rebuild a new life. I want for every Oregonian to have an opportunity like mine because educational attainment is associated with better lifelong health, economic growth, and success. This is one of the reasons why the Oregon Legislature has adopted the ambitious 40/40/20 goal, to ensure that 40 percent of adult Oregonians will have earned a bachelors' degree or higher; 40 percent of adult Oregonians will have earned an associate's degree or post-secondary credential as their highest level of educational attainment; and 20 percent of all adult Oregonians will have earned at least a high school diploma, an extended or modified high school diploma, or the equivalent of a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment. If we want to actually work towards achieving these goals, it is critical that public colleges and universities have the resources and infrastructure they need to support students from the day they step foot on campus until the day they graduate.

In addition to investments in the Public University Support Fund, I hope our state would make significant investments in the Oregon Opportunity Grant, the state's only need-based financial aid program. Funding limitations have meant that the Oregon Opportunity grant is not available to thousands of students who demonstrate significant financial need. Funding for the OOG should be increased in order to provide a realistic possibility of college affordability for Oregon's low- and middle-income students.

Finally, our public universities and colleges have played an important role in addressing the pandemic. Reduced funding would challenge the UO's ability to continue providing the fast, efficient, and accurate research and testing required to ensure our state's equitable recovery. Budget cuts to higher education would be particularly difficult during this critical time. Thank you for serving our community. I know you are facing tough budget decisions this session, and I hope you will prioritize funding for public education.

Awab Al-Rawe