

Hello to the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Nick Keough and I am an undergraduate student at the University of Oregon.

Today, I am here to ask your support on SB 849, the Basic Needs Navigators Bill

As a low-income student, navigating higher education and making ends meet while doing so has been one of the biggest challenges of my life thus far. I have served tables full-time throughout most of my time at college to make loose ends meet and afford things like my rent, food, textbooks, tuition, gas, and all my other expenses. As hard I work, often things still come up short and I'll tell you that the things that fall off first are usually my basic needs expenses.

For instance, when I was a student at Lane Community College there was a year-long period when I was food-insecure. I essentially had no income at the time, so the times that I ate were either at the student food pantry, or when a friend or teacher would buy me a meal because they were aware of my situation. I remember the times that I was in class when I was so hungry that I couldn't focus or retain the material because I was so dazed from hunger. I lost a significant amount of weight very rapidly, and I remember people asking why they could suddenly see my collar bones more. It was humiliating, and I didn't feel like I had support from the school itself and didn't feel like there was anyone there to help me navigate the complex and confusing legalities and paperwork of applying for public assistance. Had there been a basic needs coordinator on campus, I imagine my situation could have been very different.

As someone who has been a student for a while, I know my story is not singular. I have met many other students who have had to choose between food and textbooks. I have met other students who have failed classes or dropped out entirely because they could not prioritize their basic needs. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the stories have only gotten more frequent. When students are not able to meet their basic needs and aren't able to make it to graduation, it doesn't just drastically impact that student's life and trajectory...it impacts the entire state of Oregon and our future economy. A basic needs coordinator is the bare minimum that this legislator could do to address this issue, and I hope you will by voting YES on SB 849.