

Co-Chairs Frederick, McLain, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Timothy Withrow and I live in Portland, OR. I am a second-year honors student at the University of Oregon. 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.

As a first-generation student and a recipient of the Oregon Opportunity Grant, the affordability of college education has weighed heavily on my academic decisions since my time as a high school senior. I am very fortunate to have received the financial support necessary to further my education, but this has come through great effort and mental strain. I also realize that for many the ability to afford a college education poses an even greater challenge. With tuition consistently rising year after year, the value of a degree continuing to decrease, and all the other systemic barriers to quality education, for many higher education just doesn't seem attainable. That is a shame, as I can genuinely say my time at college has been a transformative experience and one I will be forever grateful for. It has provided me with perspectives, opportunities, knowledge, and support that I could get no where else. A college degree is worth so much more than the cost of admission, and that is why it is crucial for the state of Oregon to prioritize the continued funding of its educational support programs such as the PUSF and OOG. Without such support for my education, I do not know where I would be. And a lack of affordability has killed many transformative college experiences before they even get the chance to begin.

Funding for Oregon's public universities creates opportunities for all Oregon students, and it is more critical now than ever. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities for BIPOC, lower-income, and rural students. It is critical that colleges and universities have adequate resources to address these disparities and ensure that all students have access to opportunity. The willingness of policymakers to commit resources to protect the state's fragile cradle-to-career public education system may determine whether the impact of COVID-19 is measured in years or in generations. Funding limitations have meant that support through such programs as the OOG 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. Especially after such a hard year that has made clear the inequalities of our education system, failure to fund programs such as this would only prolong the harm done to low-income and BIPOC communities, widening the achievement gap and putting Oregon's future at greater risk.

I realize that in times such as these tough decisions must be made, and often someone has to lose out. But Oregon's future relies on the education of its next generations. If we want that future to be more just, more equitable, more reflective of our values as a state and as a community, than the financial support of our universities must be prioritized. I appreciate you taking the time to read my testimony, and I thank you for your work.

Sincerely,

Timothy Withrow