

April 19, 2021

Oregon Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Education  
900 Court Street, NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Investment in College Possible Oregon

Co-chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain and member of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education,

My name is Herico Phillip Aiten, I'm an alumna of College Possible Oregon. I'm writing to request you support the 2021-23 Governor's Recommended Budget requests of \$1 million investment in the HECC budget for College Possible Oregon.

My name is Herico Phillip Aiten, but others know me as Coco. I am the first in my family to earn my college degree. My family migrated from the Federated States of Micronesia when I was only two years old to pursue better work and education opportunities for my siblings and me. If it wasn't for their hard work and resilience, I would not be the woman I am today.

My parents have always pushed the importance of education on my siblings and me. Although I knew college was something I wanted to do, I was unsure of the process and how to make my dream a reality. From a young age, I always wanted to do work in education because I saw the importance of having diverse and quality educators. I believe that the education gap is an issue that needs to be addressed because education can open so many doors and create opportunities that help families escape from generational poverty. Having this in mind, I actively sought out programs in high school that would actively help me navigate through the complicated college application process. The only program that was available at Reynolds High School at the time was College Possible. I heard about College Possible through my counselor my sophomore year of high school. I was initially intimidated by the application process, but I decided to take my chances and apply.

College Possible was the first program that provided me with one-on-one mentoring, which helped me better understand the college application process, the importance of ACT preparation and community service. Although the afterschool meeting sessions were long and tiring at times, they taught me valuable skills and knowledge in the areas of financial literacy and what to expect in my upcoming college career. As my senior year was coming to an end, I started to apply for schools mostly out of state because I wanted a traditional college experience. My College Possible coach at the time was Briana Falduti. She was the one who reminded me to keep an open mind and explore my options. Taking her advice, I applied to Portland State University and didn't think much of it. PSU's a small university too close to home—what would I gain out of that?

After receiving my financial aid package from my dream school I realized that I was not going to be able to afford it. My only choice now was PSU. When I submitted my application, I was initially rejected and given the option to submit an appeal. I thought it was the end of the world and that I was never going to attend college. My College Possible coach motivated me to not give up and write my appeal. After many rough drafts and revisions I submitted my appeal and was accepted! Soon after I was accepted I was also offered a scholarship through PSU that ultimately paid for my first year and continued to give me a tuition remission for the following two

years. If it were not for my coach Briana, I truly believe that I would not have been the passionate student and community member that I am today. Her advice and mentorship helped me find a school that I came to love, value and appreciate.

Something that makes College Possible a unique program is that they follow their students from their sophomore year of high school until they graduate from college. I had the opportunity to have such wonderful and inspiring coaches for six years. Each coach helped me grow in different ways and all played a small, but important role in getting me where I am today. After my freshman year of college, I became super involved on campus and at times I felt bad for my coach. I would speak and meet up with them a couple of times a term, but they were always only a call or text away. They supported me in my work and were always available when I had questions or needed a friend to talk to. My coaches helped me so much in balancing both my academics and personal life. When we had our check-ins they tended to go for hours because our conversations would range from internship application questions to politics and all the way to my personal relationships. The hardest thing I realize about college for a first-generation student is finding consistent support and guidance, but with a College Possible coach I know that I am never alone and I have someone in my corner at all times. This is what helped me stay afloat during tough times in college.

Reflecting on my undergrad career, I can say that I have no regrets and I am thankful for all of the people who helped me along my journey. I graduated in 2019 with my Bachelors of Science. Directly after graduating I went to work for a City of Portland Commissioner. I plan to continue working with the community to gain more experience before I go back to school for my Masters in Student Affairs. My end goal is to earn a doctoral degree in education.

Thank you for considering additional support for College Possible. I truly believe in the importance and impact of this program for Oregon students.

Sincerely,

**Herico Philip Aiten**

Reynolds High School, Class of 2015  
Portland State University, Class of 2019  
College Possible Alumna