

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

My name is Joseph Volpi, MD and I live in Eugene. I am a graduate of the University of Oregon and OHSU and I am medical Director of Orchid Health, an organization which provides health care to underserved rural Oregon communities. 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.

I am writing on behalf of these measures because I am a product of what can be achieved with programs like these. I grew up in rural Oregon to a family that could not afford to send me to college. I served in the US Navy as a way to get money for college. Even then the GI Bill was only enough to cover tuition; It didn't pay my rent, provide food, or pay other bills such as the internet. The GI Bill was also only good for 4 years which meant I was on my own to pursue further education. I did receive the Pell grant but even then after using the GI Bill, having scholarships, and attending in-state public universities for my education I am still saddled with >\$300,000 in student loan debt. This made the decision to become a Family Physician a hard one knowing that is what I wanted to do but as a result I may not be able to pay that off for at least 10-15 year.

I would not be where I am today without public investment in education. Without the support that I had the communities of Estacada, Oakridge, Blue River, and Elmira would have less access to health care. These are the kinds of investments that not only have direct effects on lives but also have profound indirect effects on other Oregonians, your constituents.

PUSF:

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.

Our public universities and colleges have played an important role in addressing the pandemic. Reduced funding would challenge UO's ability to continue providing the fast, efficient, and accurate research and testing required to ensure our state's equitable recovery.

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.

The budget needs of Oregon's education sector are a recipe for an equitable recovery.

Budget cuts to higher education would be particularly harmful during this critical time.

OOG:

The OOG is Oregon's largest state-funded, need-based grant program for college students. It is the state's only need-based aid program. Approximately 40,000 students receive Opportunity Grants each year.

Funding limitations have meant that the 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.

Thank you for serving our community. I know you will be forced to make tough budget decisions this session, and I hope you will prioritize funding for public education.

Sincerely,

Joseph Volpi, MD, FAAFP, FAWM