

Esteemed Congresspersons and Senators of Oregon:

As an educator of 29+ years, I have seen the intricate connection that funding has had on both the K-12 and Community College sectors of education. Nowhere has that been more prevalent than in this current year with the pandemic. As the pandemic has surged, and we have had to close our doors to face-to-face instruction, we have simultaneously been nimble first responders to the financial, food insecurity, and health security of our students. We have provided funding in the immediate crisis with technology support (laptop rentals and wi-fi hotspots loaners), wildfire shelter and relief, crisis counseling (free), and COVID vaccinations for those who are marginalized and underserved due to health care affordability. These same students are roughly comprised of 50% first generation and low-income students, for whom a post-secondary degree would not be available without the community college where I work. Our work in CTE continues with Computer Security, Machine Tool and Welding programs, and the Allied Health Field as well as Automotive repair programs that partner with the industry leaders in our area. Our community college continues to offer the most affordable training for post-secondary trades and careers to first generation and low-income students who struggle to provide for children, families, and aging parents.

Now that the pandemic is on the slow decline, those same services and the educational training and support to help our students be successful has never been more pressing. In the 2019-2021 biennium, the Community College Support Fund (CCSF) received \$641 million. To fully fund current services, colleges would need a state appropriation of \$702 million for the 2021-2023 biennium. At that funding level colleges could keep tuition increases to an average of 3.5 percent per year statewide.

Community colleges serve more systemically marginalized students than any other sector of higher education. Many of these students face barriers made worse by the pandemic and wildfires and the shift to virtual education, and the impact of these catastrophic events has prevented many from enrolling. An entire cohort of students could be left behind by this pandemic if we do not address the challenges they face. Every dollar cut from the Community College Support Fund must be made up by raising tuition or cutting programs and services, moving educational opportunities out of the reach of the Oregonians with the most need. Students need a minimum of \$200 million allocated by the Legislature for the Oregon Opportunity Grant to allow them to continue to access affordable education. Community colleges were not able to offer most in-person courses such as Career and Technical Education (CTE), so colleges have already faced significant revenue declines and budget cuts.

Community colleges are essential to responding to the recession brought on by COVID-19 and the wildfires of 2020, offering shorter-term programs directed at getting unemployed Oregonians retrained and back to work as quickly as possible.

Before the pandemic began, community college students already faced unacceptably high rates of food and housing insecurity. A recent study by the HOPE Laboratory of Temple University showed that 41 percent of community college respondents faced food insecurity over a 30-day period in the fall of 2019. 52 percent reported they had faced housing insecurity and 20 percent had experienced homelessness over the previous year. Please add your support to the funding for \$702 million for the 2021-2023 biennium to allow us to continue this work with equity for all.

Meg Turner, MA TESOL, MA Counseling