

I am writing to urge legislators to fully fund community colleges at \$702 million. The pandemic has been a difficult time for community colleges and their students, and we continue to struggle to make up for the damage that has been caused by COVID-19 restrictions.

Many of our students face barriers made worse by the pandemic and wildfires and the shift to virtual education. 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.

Failing to fund community colleges at the full amount would necessitate cutting programs and services and raising tuition and fees, putting our students' abilities to get an education and provide for their families at risk. Already, before the pandemic, community college students faced high rates of food and housing insecurity; these rates have only increased as students have lost part time jobs and are at risk of being evicted from housing. Community colleges provide an important support system when it comes to helping students connect with basic resources.

Community colleges serve students regardless of education and skill level, providing a true educational safety net and primary access point to economic opportunity. Community colleges also play an important role in economic recovery, as we serve more systemically marginalized students than any other sector of higher education. A fully functioning, fully budgeted community college system will be essential as we work to get unemployed or laid-off Oregonians back into the workplace as restrictions abate.

At Mt Hood Community College, where I am a faculty member, I have volunteered weekly during the pandemic at the student food pantry and have donated a portion of my paycheck to the Foundation, but my efforts are just a drop in the bucket. Many of my students are struggling with serious anxieties about their futures as they try to finish their education. Likewise, many of my colleagues are expressing deep fears about the future of their jobs in academia as budgets run dry. In order to support our students, we need your help. Please vote yes to fully fund community colleges.

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