

Chairs Frederick, McLain, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Steve Bence and I live in Beaverton, Oregon. I am a UO alum and a 44-year Nike employee. I served as a student athlete from 1971-1975, and was a Track 800 meters all-American. As a proud graduate of one of our public universities, I am writing to urge you to restore opportunity for all Oregon students by investing \$900 million in the Public University Support Fund, and \$200 million in the Oregon Opportunity Grant. I also hope you'll make robust investments in Sports Lottery Scholarships, which equitably fund our athletics and help create a path to success for student athletes like me.

Our public universities are incubators for global companies and leadership academies for those who will go on to hold prominent positions in state, federal, and international governments. Ducks have gone on to found multi-billion-dollar companies, serve in Congress, in cabinet positions, and play leadership roles across the globe. The real-world work experience, course work, and relationships that are built at our state's public universities are invaluable, and set students up to contribute to our economy and community.

Our public universities and colleges have also 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 vaccinations 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.

Funding for our public universities is an important investment in our state's future, but we must also prioritize funding for student financial aid so that all students have the opportunity to attend college and complete a degree. For the 2018 academic year, 44% of Oregon students were unable to meet expenses with expected resources: expected family contribution, student earnings, most institutional aid, and all grant aid. The Oregon Opportunity Grant is the state's only need-based aid program. Approximately 40,000 students receive Opportunity Grants each year, yet funding limitations have meant that the grant is not available to thousands of students who demonstrate significant financial need. Funding for the grant should be increased in order to provide a realistic possibility of college affordability for Oregon's lower- and middle-income students.

Additionally, Sports Lottery Scholarships play an important role in supporting student athletes. Student athletes make incredible contributions to our state, and funding intercollegiate athletics and academic scholarships through the Sports Lottery has a proven positive effect on enrollment, retention and diversity for about 3,000 students every year at Oregon's public universities. Sports Lottery funding recognizes that not all Oregonians find their way to higher education through the same route, or have the same needs once they arrive on campus, and I hope you make meaningful investments in this program to support the next generation of student athletes.

Thank you for listening to the budget priorities of Oregonians. I hope you will prioritize funding for public higher education and restore opportunity for all Oregon students.

Sincerely,

Steve Bence  
Beaverton, Oregon