

As a member of the East Multnomah County community and an employee of Mt. Hood Community College, I'm writing in support of HB 2907. In my role at the college I have seen firsthand the impact that insufficient funding has on the ability of the college to serve the students who need us most. Many of the students we serve are first-generation college students, or students returning to college later in life in hopes of building a better future for their families. These students need help navigating the complex systems of higher education, learning about their options to finance their education, planning the right academic path to the career they want, and succeeding in their classes. The wraparound services our college strives to provide are crucial, especially to non-traditional students and those from marginalized communities, and being able to sufficiently staff the student support positions is a constant challenge under current funding levels. These support staff serve as the friendly faces that make these students feel welcome at college and guide them to complete their degrees or certificates they need. There is no substitute for this human connection. We need to be fully staffed to continue to help these students succeed, and we need the funding to keep these critical positions filled.

As a community college graduate myself, I believe strongly in the importance of community colleges in making higher education accessible. Even though I was a good student in high school, my parents never talked to me about college. I had no idea what I was going to do after graduating, and my time at community college allowed me to explore career options and complete my general education requirements without putting myself into debt before I transferred to earn my bachelor's degree. Most people in this country will agree that any person, if they are determined, if they work hard enough, should be able to have a career that allows them to provide for their families and make a meaningful contribution to society. But when higher education isn't accessible to all, it contributes to the stratification of our society. Community colleges, through affordability, small class sizes, and the wraparound supports and services we provide - open the door for those who would otherwise not have access to a means of improving their lives. And we need to be funded appropriately to continue to keep that door open. If we as a community, as a state, as a country say that we value economic mobility, then we must fund our community colleges accordingly.