



February 10, 2021

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chairs Neron and Weber and House Education Committee members:

SEIU supports **HB 2835**. **HB 2835** seeks to improve college affordability for Oregon's most financially needy students by assisting students access additional federal aid available to them. Examples of additional federal dollars that students who are low income may qualify for include food, medical, and housing assistance and the Earned Income Tax Credit. In 2020, 41% of Oregon students reported that they experienced food insecurity. These additional federal dollars would be important in addressing the total costs of college attendance for Oregon students.

**HB 2835** establishes a benefits navigator on every public college and university campus in Oregon. A benefits navigator provides peer support that follows the ODHS model but holds institutional knowledge and can spend time with students, provide support through the application process, and point them to other resources to reduce/eliminate basic needs insecurities. Benefits navigators on campuses would increase supports to students and reduce caseloads at ODHS.

SEIU represents about 4,500 workers on the seven university campuses – many of them low wage employees. Our classified members on University campuses maintain grounds and campus spaces; support libraries; IT; health services; nutrition and academic programs in most of the non-teaching and non-management positions on campus.

SEIU members also see higher education issues from a second vantage point – over half of our now 82,000 statewide members are low wage earners; most without health care and retirement benefits. They and their families know that post-secondary training and education is the path away from poverty for their families; neighbors; clients and loved ones.

**HB 2835** is a common sense and low cost solution that will improve college affordability and reduce the need for borrowing for Oregon students. Navigators will ensure that struggling students and their families are accessing all eligible federal and state funding. SEIU asks you to move **HB 2835** to the Ways and Means committee for additional consideration.

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