

Chairs Frederick, McLain, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Casey Dreher, and I live in Cottage Grove, Oregon. I am a former foster youth, veteran, attorney, and was recently appointed to the Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission. But perhaps most importantly, I'm a graduate of Eastern Oregon University and the University of Oregon School of Law. **As a proud graduate of our state's higher education system, I'm writing to urge you and your colleagues to fund the Public University Support Fund at \$900 million, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant at a minimum of \$200 million.**

Growing up in foster care, I was reliant upon financial aid programs like the Oregon Opportunity Grant to be able to attend college. Without them, I would not have been able to afford the cost of tuition at my alma mater, Eastern Oregon University. This is a common experience for foster youth, BIPOC students, rural students, and lower-income students. In fact, students today face more than just financial insecurity when it comes to tuition – they often struggle to meet their basic needs. In the largest national survey performed by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab (surveying students at 227 institutions nationwide), 62% of community college students and 51% of university students were food or housing insecure, and this was more prevalent among former foster youth, underrepresented students of color and first-generation students.

If we want college to be a path open to **all** Oregon students, we must expand the Oregon Opportunity Grant and make investments in our public universities that will allow them to keep tuition low.

I understand that some students received small, one-time grants from the American Rescue Plan to help off-set additional costs they have experienced as a result of the pandemic. I hope these funds won't deter you from making meaningful investments in student financial aid. Oregon ranks near the bottom for our investments in state-based financial aid programs, and one-time federal grants won't make up that difference for Oregon students. It's up to us to prioritize investments in our state's future that will allow all Oregonians the opportunity to make the career decisions of their choice.

Thank you for serving our state. I know you are faced with difficult decisions everyday as legislators, but I hope this decision will be an easy one. Investments in funding for public education and in student financial aid will only make our state a more equitable, economically diverse, and resilient place to call home. Invest in our state's future by funding the Public University Support Fund at \$900 million and the Oregon Opportunity Grant at a minimum of \$200 million.

Sincerely,

Casey Dreher  
Cottage Grove