



Dear Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, and members of the Joint Subcommittee on Education:

On behalf of AFT-Oregon, I'm writing to ask for your support on a few critical issues this session. As you consider the state's higher education budget for next biennium, we hope to count on your support for the following legislation:

- **Public University Support Fund**

An investment of \$900 million in the Public University Support Fund will shield students from significant tuition increases and help maintain academic advisors and other important wrap-around services for all of Oregon's students. Unsurprisingly, COVID-19 is uniquely impacting communities of color — both physically and financially — but investments in public universities will promote equity, increase opportunity, and erode income inequality. Still today, a university degree is one of the most important paths toward economic prosperity. PUSF investments are necessary to ensure that our state doesn't foreclose post-secondary education to an entirely new generation of students — one that is drastically more diverse than the cohorts of the past. Along with at least a \$900 million investment in Oregon's diverse student population through the PUSF, we ask legislators to join us in working towards increased accountability and financial transparency around our public universities.

- **Community College Support Fund**

An investment of \$702 million will allow colleges to fully fund their current services for the 2021-2023 biennium. At this funding level, colleges could keep tuition increases to an average of 3.5% statewide per year — a key investment to ensuring economic prosperity for our future. When we do not invest in our community colleges, it's the students who pay — with tuition increases, cut programs and limited services. We need to support Oregon's students and the future of Oregon's workforce by increasing our investment in these institutions. Whether a student receives a Pell Grant, Federal Student loan or any type of scholarship, they are seeing more increases in the cost of housing, which makes keeping tuition affordable a must-have for the next biennium. Community colleges are essential to responding to the recession brought on by COVID-19 and the wildfires we experienced in 2020. Oregon's recovery will be dependent on these colleges' shorter-term programs, which are directed at getting unemployed Oregonians retrained and back into work as quickly as possible.

- **House Bill 3007**

Supporting health benefits for Oregon's part-time college and university faculty is more essential now than it has ever been. As this pandemic has taught us, health care is essential to a functioning economy. It is critical that we focus our resources on getting Oregonians access to

health care services and affordable insurance plans as quickly as possible — and right now, far too many of our part-time faculty members are either underinsured or uninsured. Many adjunct professors teach enough total hours, between multiple institutions, that they *would* qualify for health care coverage if they taught in simply one place. However, when a full-time workload is split between different jobs at different institutions, and you're considered part-time at each of those workplaces, then health care benefits become out of reach. This is unacceptable. HB 3007 would provide access to coverage under OEGB for these part-time faculty members. The program implemented by this bill will be administered by OEGB at no cost or administrative burden to the colleges and universities, and will offer the financial support and incentive needed to retain and attract our valuable part-time educators.

- **House Bill 2835**

We need to invest \$5.2 million to help Oregon students, who are disproportionately food-insecure and housing-insecure, navigate pathways to prosperity. In Oregon, 41% of students reported food insecurity in 2020 — higher than the national average. In July 2019, the Oregon Department of Human Services examined and reinterpreted the federal language for college student SNAP eligibility, which provided needed increased support to Oregon's college students, but also increased the caseload on DHS caseworkers. If passed, HB 2835 would establish a Benefits Navigator on every public college and university campus in Oregon, and create a "consortium" or "community of practice" on these campuses. Benefits Navigators would centralize information and guidance for students experiencing basic need deficits, and give students access to the help they need to enroll in SNAP and STEP benefits.

We urge your support of House Bill 2835 and House Bill 3007, as well as an increased investment in Oregon's Community College and Public University Support Funds, to help Oregonians get back on their feet and give our students the support they need to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues and for putting Oregon's students, workers and families at the forefront of your decisions.

Sincerely,

Jaime Rodriguez  
President, AFT-Oregon