

Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Gina Podesta. I am a student at Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay (but I go to the Brookings campus). I am writing to request your support for HB2835.

Having a Benefits Navigator on my campus is important to me because I am someone who has been able to utilize the benefits of the STEP program. It has helped me tremendously in my goal to go back to school and get into nursing. Without these benefits I'm not sure I would be able to continue on this path. I think that every student who qualifies should have access to anything that will help them be successful. Had my guidance counselor not told me about the STEP program, I never would have known about it, so I think that having someone who is there to make sure students are aware of any and all benefits they qualify for would be amazing!

I'm an older student who has had a rough go of things over the last decade. I have survived an assault, clawed my way back from the hell that that sent me to, and found a way to come through that horrific experience stronger. I am also someone who doesn't qualify for financial aid any longer, but am on disability so the benefits I receive through the STEP program have been a game changer. It has helped me in so many ways and has lightened the weight of worrying so much about how I will figure out how to pay for a class, or books or any number of unforeseen expenses that might arise. This is such a wonderful program that I hope more students learn it exists, because I never would have known to even ask about it. As students, we are juggling a lot of things all at once, and now with the added stress of COVID and distance learning, any help that can aid us in accomplishing the overall goal, is something I think all students should have access to. Passing this bill will help students access basic needs benefits like food, housing, and other services which would ultimately lead to their success and graduating.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

Gina Podesta
Brookings, OR