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BOG Chair at Large - OSA

House Committee on Education 2/11/21

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chris Smith. I am Western Oregon University's Director of State and Federal Affairs, I am here today to express my support for HB 2835. It is because of my lived experience as well as, the experience of my peers that I know the need and positive effect this legislation will have at colleges across Oregon. I am a first-generation American, college student, firefighter/EMT, and have been self-reliant since the death of my parents at the age of 16 when I was a junior in high school.

Coming into college from rural Marion County without parents drastically shrunk the safety net I had. due to personal and resource needs, I had to put a stop on my education at times to focus on basic needs so that when I was in school, I could devote the time needed to be a good student. This has delayed my education, keeping me from entering the workforce. Despite this, I have been more fortunate than others. As an RA, tutor, and now as a student government employee, I have seen students stop their education completely because of basic resources not being available to them. This has kept many qualified, educated, and talented workers out of the work force.

The real tragedy is, in many cases, my peers qualified for aid, but they and their academic advisors did not know that this aid was available to them. This is an important fix that will have a lasting positive impact on all Oregonians seeking an education to better themselves.

For the betterment of our state, for the most efficient uses of our resources, and to be a state that truly gives equal opportunity, a basic needs navigator at each campus is a necessity. In a state with such plentiful resources, hardworking students should not have to worry about where their next meal will come from. Therefore, I urge you to support HB 2835.

Thank you for your time and consideration.