



February 11, 2021

RE: HB 2835 – Requiring community colleges and universities to hire benefits navigators.

Dear Chair Alonso Leon and members of the House Education Committee,

The Early Childhood Coalition supports HB 2835 to place benefits navigators at community colleges and universities. As the Coalition created our 2021 agenda, we started by hearing from culturally specific and direct service organizations working with families and providers who are Black and Indigenous, people of color, and who have historically excluded from policy and budget decisions. Support for basic needs, including food, housing, and emotional support, were elevated as critical priorities for families.

Many college students are also parents of young children. Fifty percent of college students who are also parents experience food insecurity, more than those who are not parents. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 16% of all children in Oregon experienced food insecurity. Due to systemic inequality, greater food insecurity is experienced in Black and Indigenous communities, communities of color, and other marginalized communities.

While food insecurity is detrimental to child development, access to adequate, culturally relevant, healthy foods supports better health, success in school, and reduced family stress. In short, food access helps children thrive.

Having navigators at public colleges and universities is one opportunity to meet families and communities where they are, rather than asking families to find their way to state offices, which may not be where families feel most comfortable or have easiest access. This proposal is one smart example of listening to those most directly impacted, asking them to inform the design of a solution, and making public policy changes that align with that vision.

When racial equity and communities who have been marginalized are at the center of decision-making, programs and services can mitigate disparities by race/ethnicity, income, geography, disability, language, immigrant and refugee status, houselessness, and foster care. We ask legislators to commit to continued improvement in support for all of Oregon's young children and their families and to center the voices of those most impacted by legislative actions in their decision-making processes. Solutions must be built with families, to work for them.

We urge the passage of HB 2835.

Sincerely,

Children's Institute

Family Forward Oregon

Multnomah County