

Dear House Education Committee,

I am Eleazar Gamez, Pronouns He/Him/El. I am a first-generation DACAmented college student currently attending Portland State University. The road to be where I am today has been far from easy. When I was in high school, my biological father decided to walk out on my family and me. The hardest outcome of his result was seeing my mother working endlessly to try and make ends meet each month for basic needs such as rent, water, garbage, light, etc. My mother has always been resilient and has always found a way to make sure that the basic necessities were met for my siblings and me. After a couple of months, my mother was falling behind on bills. She was a single mother, working to give the best she could to her three children. We were forced to move into Public housing section 7 in Hillsboro Oregon. Where we would receive assistance with our rent from the federal government.

A couple of months after, my mother had an appointment at the doctor's which I did not know about. On November 28th, 2017 my mother sat me at the dinner table to speak with me. She told me something that was extremely hard for her to say. She was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. To that point in my life, that had been the most difficult event in my life. I felt so hopeless and powerless. The Woman to who I owe everything was fighting a battle that I could not help fight for her, but rather support her through the way. My mother underwent Chemotherapy and Radiation as well as other forms of medication to help fight cancer. After months of fighting long and hard against this horrendous disease, my mother was declared cancer-free shortly after my high school graduation.

After beating cancer, she had casual check-ins at the doctors to make sure that her cancer was not coming back and make sure her health kept on improving. I took her to her appointments, and I recall taking her to get a biopsy done that her doctor requested. My mother and I didn't think much of this at the time, we thought it was routine. A couple of weeks pass by and we get a phone call that we need to schedule an appointment to meet with her doctor and go over the results. Again, my mother and I didn't think much of this. We walked in and got checked in, waited in the lobby until my mother was called, and my mother got up. I too got up to go with her and help translate if needed. She turned and looked at me and asked me to stay seated and handed me her purse. After 40 minutes my mother came out again.

She seemed fine, so I was relieved. As we walked out the office doors and out the lobby, she turned and hugged me with all her strength and might, and cried endlessly, I could hear so much pain and feel she was scared. I hugged her as hard as I could. She told me cancer had come back, stage four terminal. In times of uncertainty and hardships, I always put a strong face

for my family and assure them things will be okay and we will find one way or another to get through whatever the situation was. And that was exactly what I did for my moms that second. As much as I was scared of the new battle coming ahead, I made sure to reassure my mom that she would be able to beat cancer as she did the first time around. I lost many schools my freshman year of college and was falling behind in school due to making sure to take my mother to all of her appointments for treatments, and check-ups. It was the absolute least I can do for all she had done for my siblings and me.

Though she underwent many hard extensive treatments in efforts to control the growth of the tumor, it was harder and harder as time progressed. This tumor had been the most aggressive the doctors had ever dealt with. As my Freshman year of college came to an end, I decided to cancel my on-campus living contract to move home and assist my family more. My mother became quite ill. Day by day her health declined and declined. Her oxygen level kept on decreasing. On November 17th, early morning, my mother passed away. November 17th became the longest day of my life. And the days after also seemed to have gone by slow. Fortunately, with the help of the community, friends, and family, the expenses for the expenses that came with her passing were covered. I had to take a couple of days off from school to make sure I handled these decisions and arrangements were done properly. As she had a service done at a local church, and I made sure her transportation was arranged to her native land, things started to ease for my family and me.

Shortly after, I proceeded to continue with college, I had to continue my work and continue my classes and assignments. While being a full-time college student at Portland State University, I also became the guardian for my younger brother. We continue to live in public housing in Hillsboro. In the apartment where we live, it's just my brother and me. It took a while for me to adjust to college, home responsibilities such as cleaning, cooking, and working to pay the bills at home. While also making sure my brother is doing well in school, and caring for him.

After my mother passed away, I had to provide a copy of her death certificate to the Department of Human Services in Hillsboro. I then had to file a new application for my younger brother and me. The application was very complex to fill out. I for one wasn't sure about all of the information the application was asking. It was a lot of going back and forth with home documents, making sure I was inputting the correct information. Furthermore, it was a lot of back in forth calls and texts with a family member regarding what some of the questions were referring to. Every six months, I have to submit a check-in form, which has gotten a bit easier to getting used to.

I currently receive two forms of assistance, food stamps, and rent assistance. Purchasing food meals a month is expensive, and food stamps allow me to make sure that aspect of my responsibilities is covered. We are currently going through hard times due to the pandemic. However, with the rent assistance I receive, it provides enough support for me to make sure I have the rent covered with the sources of income I currently have. Being a full-time college student sure takes a good part of my time, week after week. Therefore, limiting the number of hours I am able to work. Which leads to making sure I am working enough hours to make sure I make ends meet. I know I would be struggling a lot more if I was unable to receive assistance from both Food Stamps and Rent assistance. These two benefits are so beneficial to many college students across the state. Hundreds of college students do not know they are in fact eligible to receive such assistance. This bill will help support students to continue their education and not have to put their education on hold for not being able to make ends meet on their personal bills. Therefore, it is crucial for this bill to pass.

Thank you for your time. And I urge the committee to vote YES on HB2385.