

NOTE: I will be delivering the below as oral testimony when the hearing is rescheduled.

Good afternoon Chair Dembrow and members of the committee. My name is Francis Pastorelle. I work in student housing at a large public higher ed institution in Oregon. The views I express today are my own, and do not represent any other entity.

I've worked in student housing for the last decade. Over the last five years, I've had the privilege of working in family housing. In my role, I have been inspired by the ways in which student parents overcome myriad obstacles to excel as students while raising their children. Many of these students are balancing part-time jobs or full-time jobs, club involvement, child supervision, and relationships, all while pursuing a degree within a university system that was created for younger students without dependents.

While I am proud of my university's family housing program, which ranks among the largest and best in the nation, I know that we are not meeting the current need. Our over 400 apartments and houses are almost always filled to capacity, with a wait list of up to 18 months. Weekly, I receive emails from campus partners advocating on behalf of students in need of housing. And yet, the only new construction has been traditional residence halls built for single students without families.

This is not surprising. Universities run on numbers. With budgets diminished by the COVID-19 crisis, auxiliary departments like University Housing are unable to expend what little they have without knowing the scope of the issue or the return on investment. That is why this bill is so important. If institutions of higher education knew how many students were balancing their role as parents, professionals like myself would be better able to advocate for the need for increased resources to student parents. More services, more childcare, and in my case, more housing suitable for student families. Without knowing the scope of the need, we can expect that universities will continue to cater to the populations they do know. With more students opting to put off their college career due to COVID, the number of student parents will not decrease, nor will the need for family student services.

I am amazed by what my residents are able to overcome. But just because they are capable of overcoming adversity, doesn't mean we should be creating additional barriers. I hope that you will support this bill, so that universities can begin to meet the rising needs of student parents. Thank you all for your time and consideration, and for all your efforts on behalf of our students and their families.