

Chair Evans, Vice Chairs Lewis and Meek, and members of the committee,

My name is Emily Wanous and I am the Legislative Director for the Oregon Student Association, a statewide coalition of college students in Oregon public postsecondary education which currently represents about 70,000 members at several universities and community colleges in Bend, Monmouth, Eugene, and Portland.

I am here to express concern with HB 2237. Financial Aid access is a top priority for OSA this session, with students struggling to survive and stay in school during this pandemic, over 3 in 4 students who qualify for the Oregon Opportunity Grant cannot receive it due to severe state divestment.

As written, HB 2237 would create more barriers to financial aid access when what we need is less barriers. You will see student testimony which has been submitted detailing that aspect. What I will focus on here is that I am aware that there are some amendments being considered which would specify these restrictions are regarding merit based aid, not need based financial aid. I want to clarify that even with those amendments, OSA has deep equity concerns with this bill. First off, low income students rely on merit based aid as well as need based aid. Second, this bill specifically exercises authority over the financial aid managed by the HECC and the Oregon Student Access Commission. To my knowledge, all financial aid managed by OSAC is need based, not merit based. Given that, I want to be very clear that our members are seriously concerned about this bill. I understand the noble goals of wanting to help the state of Oregon have a more robust Emergency Management workforce, but leveraging financial aid access in order to achieve those ends is not the right way to go, especially with students getting priced out, facing alarming rates of food and housing insecurity, and struggling to access the very limited financial aid available as it is, and with BIPOC and low income students already being disproportionately impacted by all of the issues I just mentioned. I ask that you all go back to the drawing board with this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Emily Wanous