

Submitter: Virginia Luka
On Behalf Of: Oregon Pacific Islander Coalition
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB4091

Alii and hello. My name is Virginia Luka and I use she/they pronouns. I was born in Micronesia on the island of Palau to a Palauan mother and white father. I lived in Guam for 25 years before moving to Oregon 19 years ago.

I attended Rogue Community College in Medford, then transferred to Southern Oregon University where I earned degrees in education and anthropology and then to Portland State University for my masters degree in educational leadership and policy where I focused on Micronesia student needs in higher education.

If you were to properly disaggregate the Pacific Islander category, you will see Micronesians make up the largest Pacific Islander population here in Oregon.

My area of expertise is recruitment and retention, program and policy development and understanding Micronesia students and their unique challenges compared to their other Pacific Islander peers.

Please allow me to focus on just the Federated States of Micronesia (aka FSM), which are the islands of Chuuk, Pohnpei, Yap, and Kosrae. The FSM government contracted Francis X. Hezel and Michael J. Levin to conduct a survey in 2012. Their extensive survey collected valuable data regarding various aspects of health, education, and lived experiences. Hezel and Levin (2012) estimate 50,000 people from FSM, or a third of the population has migrated (p. 9).

An estimate of 24,000 from FSM has moved to the US. The top two reasons for the move were employment and education.

Let's focus on just educational attainment:
24,000 people moved to the US from the FSM
6,447 of these people came to the US for education.
4,428 people took some college classes
425 completed a 4 year degree
252 completed a graduate degree or higher

2.8% of the FSM population in the US has a 4 year degree or higher
This data highlights the need to understand the societal, cultural, and institutional barriers in place that are keeping Micronesians from completing four year degrees or higher.

What our community needs is funding for staff and programming to support campus

communities that recognize and celebrate Pacific Islander students from Micronesian, Melanesian, and Polynesian cultures.

We need mentoring programs for our students to connect with culturally matching mentors that can help them access resources, get through hard times, stay in school, and complete their programs, as well as connect them with employment, internships, and off-campus communities.

There are numerous Pacific Islander serving organizations that are doing great work right now, but they need access to more funding to expand and continue their work.

We need funding to support community based participatory research to gather stories and fully understand the educational needs of our Pacific Islanders in Oregon in order to inform programs and policies.

Kom kmal mesulang for your time. Thank you very much!