

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Braatz, I am a student at Portland State University, and I am here today to talk about the ways I know the Oregon Opportunity Grant has helped support my peer's academic journey.

I began my academic journey at Western Oregon University, where I received my Bachelor's of Science in Criminal Justice. I am currently a Washington State resident, and was fortunate to receive scholarships and the WUE, which helped contribute to my ability to graduate debt free. Even with that type of financial support, I still worked part-time, and contributed money from my life-savings in order to graduate debt-free. Although I worked extremely hard to graduate debt free, it is with an immense amount of privilege to express that pride. Many of my friends and peers sent money home to their families, from the jobs they worked. Many of my friends and peers worked not two, not, three, but four or more job positions, to pay for tuition, room and board, monthly bills, food, send money home, but even then, they scraped by every month. My friends, and my peers, are not working towards the American Dream, many, if not all, are just trying to survive. I know, the direct impact of the Oregon Opportunity Grant. I can confidently sit in front of this body and say, that it has saved lives. The Oregon Opportunity Grant disproportionately serves students from underserved groups, including students of color, women, low-income, rural and first-generation students. Oregon Opportunity Grant recipients tend to earn their degrees faster, as compared to low-income students who do not receive the grant. As I understand it, this mechanism, the auction, means fewer students get grants than would be the case through regular appropriations. This seems like a waste of money that could go to students. Maybe for the pursuance of the American Dream, but rather, to have a fighting chance of a successful, and happy life.

Thank you for your time, and we hope that students can count on you to ensure that every dollar possible is going directly to the Oregon Opportunity Grant award recipients.