

February 15, 2023

RE: House Bill 2979, 2996, & 3223

TO: The House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

FROM: Daniela Guerrero, Dental Assisting Student Class of 2023

Dear Chair Nosse and Members of the Committee,

My name is Daniela Guerrero and I am a dental assisting student. I attended the Public Hearing on February 13th in regards to House Bills 2979, 2996, & 3223.

But that is not why I am writing. During the Public Hearing, I heard from those supporting these bills along with others how going back to school is not feasible for “single mothers” or people who are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). While sitting in the audience, I felt offended and felt like my voice was being taken away from me. While I appreciate them trying to speak for me, they are really not in the position as they are so fortunate.

So I am writing this letter to get my voice back.

When I started my prerequisites to apply for the dental assisting program, I didn't have my family to fall back on. As a matter of fact, I was homeless for about two years of my adolescence. I had just turned 15 and I got pregnant. My mother kicked me out and the father of my child was going through a hard time with his parents being deported. I worked really hard to graduate from high school with a lot of resources, including teachers and daycare providers. Did I mention I'm a DACA recipient? This made my life so much harder. It wasn't my choice to come to the United States but this meant no federal funding and no federal help. I was all alone. However, that did not stop me. I had a choice to prove to myself and to prove to everyone that I was able to succeed in life.

I knew that I wanted to go into a community college, so I chose a school close to me and everything was contactless. It was when COVID was at its peak, and I knew that I was going to have to do everything virtually and that's what I did. I made appointments with advisors, with navigators, and financial aid. I wanted all the information I could possibly get. I came across college foundation scholarships, and I put in some work. I strategized, and made it very clear of what my goal was and it was to enter the dental assisting program. I submitted the essays and about a week and a half I received acceptance letters of two scholarships that wanted to help me achieve my goal in dental assisting as well as acceptance to the Oregon Promise. With that being said, I didn't have to pay anything to take my prerequisites. I did the majority of my prerequisites via zoom and I took night classes. I finished my prerequisites in two terms and gained some money back. I knew that the hard work was paying off. However, there are so many resources at the college that I never ever even knew about. I joined Trio, I became a student ambassador and I only worked about 10 hours a week for a tuition waiver. There is also the STEP program. I didn't qualify for it, but I made sure everyone that was able to apply for it knew about it because it was such a useful resource. I would often get bus passes because I didn't drive when I started school, and I would use the food pantry. They even have a closet for professional attire in case you need to go to an interview. Community colleges are just such a

great help for the community and most people don't even know about all the help they provide, and I'm so grateful.

When I entered the dental assisting program It became real. This is what I have been working for. I had the scholarships and this was the opportunity. Everything that I am doing now I can say that I am not doing it alone as I have resources. For example, my community college has resources for when I had to put my daughter in daycare. I have instructors and a village of support. I've been putting in the work and there's nothing but a better feeling than when you know the material and being able to put it to use.

I just wanted to share my story to explain that being a single mother or a person of color should not be used as leverage by others to get their bill passed. I felt like those who were presenting were insinuating that we could attend a traditional program and/or pass the national exams.

I am here to earn a career and not just a job. Attending the Public Hearing on Monday was not only eye-opening, but disappointing.

Thank you for listening to my story,

Daniela Guerrero