

Chair Lively, Vice Chair Ruiz, Vice Chair McIntire, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Avan Ahmad, and I am a student at Portland Community College. Beyond being just a student, I am an ASPCC Senator, the club leader for the First-Generation Immigrant Refugee Students, and advocate for the Accessible Ed & Disability Resources.

Today, I am to speak in support of House Bill 3121.

I moved to the United States on December 4, 2000. As a Muslim Kurdish/Iraqi in America, I started high school at the worst possible time in September of 2001. From being a refugee growing up in three different wars to the discrimination I faced in high school once I got to America, I have been through so much.

When I decided to go to PCC, I was hoping for a new start. I originally came to college to gain knowledge and resources to help refugees and immigrants like me to provide a safe place and a healthier way to help parents and kids understand and integrate in a different country.

When I started college classes, I struggled because classes were expensive, and books were costly. On top of that, I struggled due to the material that wasn't second language friendly, and many books came with codes that were difficult to navigate. I ended up having to leave college and put my dreams on hold.

In 2022, I decided to go back to school and reenroll at PCC. This time, I felt I was more prepared, and I hadn't realized I was suffering from ADHD. As an ADHD person, it's difficult to retain attention or understand the challenging material.

Since returning, I believe OER has made a huge difference not just for myself, but people with disabilities and people that speak different languages like me. OER allows professors and faculty to write in a way for all of us to understand and be confident in the material, rather than struggle and give up. The price of books is ridiculous because we are already paying a lot in just tuition. I have seen and heard how it's been so helpful when the books are either free or low-cost because the book costs about \$10-\$15, which is a huge difference from \$49 to \$150.

With OER, my classmates and I have talked about how grateful we are for it to be available online and being able to only have the material that we need, rather than the extra material that adds confusion and aren't even assigned. I have heard many stories of people who don't want to come back to college because the books are so expensive. No student should have to choose between a textbook and feeding themselves, paying a utility bill, or paying their gas. Even students who receive full financial aid, the financial aid does not cover the full cost of their tuition, let alone their textbooks costs. We need to do more to support textbook affordability and OER.

I will move on to PSU eventually, and I understand the books are even more expensive there. I am concerned about the debt I will accumulate. A friend who is a student there said there they had to re-think taking a class because the textbook cost \$150. We all want to be successful, but we can't continuously worry about the price of books. We all want to succeed and have the same opportunity. We want to make our parents proud and ourselves proud. I'm sure you all understand that very well.

That's why I'm here standing in front of all of you, asking you, please consider us as students and our future to be able to reach our goals and help get the education to give back to our communities and help to empower not just students but our parents and next generations of students. There should be more open-source books that people have access to because it helps support students with fewer resources.

Thank you for your time and hearing my story. I hope that I can count on your support of House Bill 3121 and Oregon Open Educational Resources.