



**Testimony on HB 3565**  
House Committee on Higher Education  
March 21, 2023

Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 3565.

In 2022, Governor Brown and the legislature made, so far as HECC has been able to determine, a first in the nation commitment to students who are enrolled members of federally recognized tribes in our State. Through a \$19 million special purpose appropriation allocated to the Emergency Board, the legislature authorized HECC to develop a grant program designed to provide robust support to tribal learners attending Oregon institutions of higher education, ensuring full coverage of cost of attendance at public institutions, and a significant cost-of-attendance subsidy at private institutions.

HECC does not have historical data on 'students who are enrolled members of Oregon-based, federally recognized tribes' as a class, though the existence of this grant program means we will have better data in the future, but we do have data on Native American/Alaska Native students. These data show that only 36% of Native American/Alaska Native identifying students enroll in higher education (19% lower than white students), and only 12% (16% lower than white students) obtain a post-secondary degree or certificate within six years of high school graduation. Native American students in Oregon enroll in college and university less, have greater levels of financial need, and take longer to complete than the median college or university student. The Oregon Tribal Student Grant is a significant attempt to close these gaps and improve the wage and career prospects of tribal learners.

Since opening the program to applicants on May 1, 2022, HECC has authorized 535 students to receive program funds, and 365 students have enrolled in higher education programs. We have also solidified relationships with each of the nine tribes that allow us to verify that applicants are enrolled tribal members and work with them to make sure that students are able to easily access these funds. Of the students currently benefiting from the program today, 82% are enrolled full-time at their institution, a testament to the focus on studies students can achieve when their education is adequately funded.

HB 3565 codifies the parameters of the Oregon Tribal Student Grant Program into law. For the first year of the program, HECC has drawn on our rulemaking authority over financial aid programs to run this effort, and this bill is largely a codification of those rules. But this bill is still very important, as it establishes the grant as a permanent fixture in the financial aid landscape, and establishes the funding as ongoing, sending an important signal to tribal education officials, institutions, and learners about the reliability of this grant. HECC's perspective is the failing to continue the grant could have even more harmful impacts to tribal students than having never offered it in the first place. We believe the Legislature made its original appropriation to HECC with this understanding, and the understanding that the bill before you today would be one of HECC's most important 2023 legislative priorities. We strongly encourage you to support HB 3565.

Thank you for your time today.