

Good afternoon, Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Ruiz and Vice-Chair McIntire and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Naomi McCreary and I am the Program Director for the Southern Oregon University Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program, and also the Communications Representative on the Oregon TRIO Association Board of Directors. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today.

I am here to provide testimony supporting HB3120-2, The Higher Education Coordinating Commission shall establish a grant program for the purpose of supporting organizations that expand the scope and community reach of college access and success programs for the purpose of increasing college enrollment and post-secondary completion rates for Oregon's historically underrepresented. This bill also aligns with the recommendations of the Joint Task Force On Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education (JTUSHE).

In the last biennium budget, HB 2412-2 invested \$5 Million to five College Access and Success organizations in the state. The intended purpose of those funds was to increase support services for Oregon's historically underrepresented students and expand the number of students served across the state.

TRIO programs are designed to serve low-income and first-generation students looking to improve their lives through education. Currently, Oregon has 54 Grants serving over 11,000 students from middle school through adult and college-aged students. The programs are federally funded through the department of education. The previous state investment in the Oregon TRIO Association expanded these services to new communities and worked with institutions and community organizations to increase the number of grants statewide and serve additional students. As a result, we have added nine (9) new TRIO grants to the state. This outcome generated over \$2 million in additional annual funding from the federal budget, over 1,000 new students served annually, and over 20 new jobs across the state. Additionally, funds were utilized to support current program operations, create state-wide student events, provide scholarships to those no longer eligible for Pell grant funding, and support study abroad educational opportunities.

I would like to share how this funding also helped one of my students in the Southern Oregon University McNair Program. I had a student that was one term away from graduating with their bachelor's degree, but had exhausted all of their financial aid. Due to a lack in funds this student was planning on stopping out of school and hoping to come back someday in the future to complete their degree. As a TRIO professional I understand the difficulty students have completing a degree after having to stop out. It is very difficult to get back into school once you leave. This student applied to one of the scholarships that the Oregon TRIO Association was able to provide due to the previous state investment in the association mentioned above. This scholarship was called the Last Mile Award, specifically for students that are needing funds to finish their undergraduate degree. This student was awarded the Oregon TRIO Association Last Mile Award scholarship, and will be graduating from Southern Oregon University with their bachelor degree on March 31, 2023. This particular student also applied to graduate programs once they knew that they were going to be able to complete their undergraduate degree, and has been accepted into a fully funded graduate program to continue their education. It was solely the funding provided in the Oregon TRIO Association Last Mile Award that allowed this student to

complete their undergraduate degree, and enabled him to start a fully funded graduate program this upcoming fall.

A continued investment in community-based organizations through HB3120-2 will uniquely address the needs of underrepresented students in higher education throughout Oregon. I acknowledge that TRIO programs are limited in the impact we can have statewide, despite running effective programming in our service areas. I believe that an investment in the Oregon TRIO Association is a remarkable return on investment that can help maintain the effective management and constant expansion of TRIO programs throughout the state. TRIO is impactful at serving underrepresented students in Oregon; let's work together to increase the number of students who benefit from these services.

I invite you to approve HB 3120-2.

Best regards,
Naomi McCreary