

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Ruiz & McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony. My name is Andrea Haverkamp, and I am delivering remarks on behalf of AFT-Oregon. Our labor federation has public university and community college faculty, instructors, classified staff, graduate employees, researchers, and more within its ranks. Many of our members have themselves gone to college in Oregon or are working to send their children to college in Oregon.

Our Political and Legislative Affairs Committee voted in support of endorsing HB 3499. This bill does two important things. First, it mandates that public community colleges and universities cease charging tuition to residents. Second, it commissions a study on how to bring public universities – one of our important public goods - back under public oversight and management.

AFT-Oregon's President, Jaime Rodriguez, has championed equity for Oregon students and workers, including easing student loan and education burdens. In support of this bill, he states: "Over the last few decades, higher education has unfairly placed the costs of college education on the backs of students. This has become unacceptable as not only tuition and fees are astronomical, but so are books, housing, and food. This has made it tougher for everyday students to afford attending higher education. As it stands, a college degree has become a goal attainable only for increasingly affluent households. The time has come for free tuition."

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the labor movement led the fight for universal access to primary and secondary education as a basic social right. In the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement fought for and won the right of all Americans to equal access to public education. These efforts have been rolled back and dismantled in recent decades. Never has it been more urgent: in the twenty-first century, a college education is a prerequisite for effective labor force participation and economic security for workers and their families. The lack of access by growing numbers of Americans to postsecondary education severely limits democratic participation in the economic and political processes of the United States and results in a tragic loss of diverse human potential. Low- and middle-income students are increasingly unable to afford the full cost of public college due to decreasing state support and the resulting increases in tuition and fees.

We understand the transformative impacts of fully funded higher education. The free tuition policy in effect in the City University of New York system until the 1970s brought higher education within reach for tens of thousands of people, including a lengthy list of prominent public officials, academics, and others for whom it would otherwise have been unreachable, and studies have shown that the GI Bill, which provided a generation of World War II veterans full tuition support and stipends to attend postsecondary education institutions, was one of the most successful programs in our nation's history and that every \$1.00 invested in this program on those who would not have otherwise attended college produced a \$6.90 return in increased national output and tax revenues.

States from coast to coast, from California to New York, are working to bring their education systems back to this standard. New Mexico has moved forward in an exciting way towards ensuring every resident can attend college and university.

Nationally, the American Federation of Teachers has passed resolutions calling for fully funded and free tuition in [1977](#), [2005](#), and [2009](#). This bill matches AFT's vision for an equitable, inclusive, and accessible higher education system. We urge a yes vote and to pass this bill out of committee.

We urge a Yes vote on HB 3499.

Andrea Haverkamp, Political Organizer, American Federation of Teachers - Oregon