

## **Higher Education for All Statement**

My name is Dr. Gia Naranjo-Rivera, and I urge you to support the Higher Education for All bill (HB 3499).

I have been blessed to have access to higher education, and I'm here to speak on behalf of those who don't have access and can't afford it. I easily could have been one of them.

I am an afro-indigenous Cuban American and grew up in a low-income household. My father was a Cuban immigrant, and my mom ultimately raised my siblings and I as a single mom for most of my childhood. I had the good fortune of earning a scholarship to a private school, then college—Columbia University, and went on to earn two masters degrees and PhD from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. I am currently a post-doctoral fellow at UCSF completing the program at a distance.

Over \$600,000 has been invested in my brain by way of scholarships. I still carry heavy debt despite receiving scholarships. I believe this investment has been more than worth it. I have helped build youth programs serving 1,000's of underserved and BIPOC children, including on the north Oregon coast; advanced human rights in the US and abroad; and improved public health equity working at the National Institutes of Health and elsewhere.

I would not have had these opportunities without massive scholarships, and for each one I earned many others did not.

### **Education does not need to be a zero sum game.**

Education is key for many to develop their full potential, contribute to society and the economy, and be able to support themselves and their families.

The related inequities of trauma, poor access to education, and health disparities disproportionately affect immigrants, refugees, BIPOC, low-income, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups.

**Supporting education is Oregonian, and American.** Prioritizing higher education and its wide-reaching ripple effects is an investment in diversity, equity, inclusion, and a more thriving future. We owe it to ourselves and future generations to invest today. Please support the Higher Education for All bill (HB 3499).

Thank you,

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