



April 24, 2023

Joint Committee on Education
Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Please support full funding for Oregon Public Universities

Co-Chairs Frederick, McLain, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Carmen Castro, I am the Executive Director of the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber with offices in both Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington. I am a graduate of the University of Oregon. As you are making important budget decisions this legislative session, I encourage you to support Oregon's students through robust investments in public higher education, including funding the Public University Support Fund (PUSF) at \$1.05 billion and increasing the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) by \$200 million.

Our organization serves the growing Hispanic population in Oregon and SW Washington, by providing technical assistance to Hispanic owned small businesses, providing scholarship support to Hispanic students to access higher education and professional growth development to Hispanic professionals. Our organization greatly benefits from having local Hispanic college graduates to do its work. Currently we have graduates from PSU, U of O and Western Oregon University who are doing important and necessary work in our community to lift small businesses towards a successful tomorrow. Over 70% of our employees are first generation college students for whom attending a public university has led to a great career serving the community. All needed financial aid to graduate. Even members of my own immediate family would not have been able to attend without receiving the Oregon Opportunity grant, for which we are most grateful.

Oregon ranks 45th in the country for per-student, state funding of public universities and invests less than half the national average in financial aid per public university student. As Oregon's students and workforce continue to face lasting impacts from the pandemic, we must ensure that higher education is more attainable for every student.

- Funding for Oregon's public universities creates opportunities for all Oregon students, and it is more critical now than ever. After multiple years of pandemic-related challenges, students have greater needs than ever before. It is critical for the state to support wraparound services such as financial aid, academic support, career

development, and basic needs support – including food and housing assistance through Benefits Navigators – to meet the growing needs of our increasingly diverse student bodies.

- While a 4-year degree and beyond is a critical step in opening opportunities for all students, especially those from BIPOC communities, many students see college as unaffordable. Often, students are balancing meeting their basic needs with obtaining a college degree to support their career goals. Oregon’s public universities have been stepping into the gap, doing more with less, and working to support students. But they need the state to step in to help give all students an opportunity for success.
- Oregon is facing critical workforce shortages. To address these shortages, the state must prioritize creating a highly skilled workforce to support essential industries. Oregon’s public universities are responding to industry needs despite limited state resources, creating a diverse pipeline of highly skilled workers to power our economy.

In addition to investing in the PUSF and OOG, I encourage you to sustain funding for tribal student grants, which help fund undergraduate tuition, housing, books, and other costs for eligible, enrolled members of Oregon’s Tribes.

Thank you for your service to our state and thank you for supporting Oregon’s students and public higher education institutions.

Sincerely,



Carmen G Castro
Executive Director
Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber