



April 18, 2023

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

Re: Help public universities address food insecurity by funding the PUSF at \$1.05 billion

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

Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO) is a statewide anti-poverty advocacy organization with a small staff of under 15 members. We understand that leadership comes from those with lived experience and that hunger and poverty do not exist on their own, but rather a result of overlapping systems of oppression that create layers of privilege and inequity. Our values and work are centered in creating systemic changes to end hunger. At PHFO, we do not seek to just feed our neighbors, we seek our shared liberation from systems of oppression and to address the root causes of hunger. Which is why we are asking you to support students in need by funding the Public University Support Fund (PUSF) at \$1.05 billion and increasing the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) by \$200 million.

Over the last decade, and particularly since the beginning of the pandemic, our public universities have been doing more with less and supporting our students beyond the classroom to ensure they are able to put their best foot forward in the classroom.

One way they have done this is by funding Benefits Navigators at each university. Benefits Navigators help students access basic needs services, such as food and housing assistance. Between April and December 2022, Benefits Navigators served nearly 8,000 students, helping them to access the services they need to meet their basic needs so they're able to focus on their classes.

Many of our public universities also provide on-campus food pantries to students in need, providing them with a safe and accessible resource so they don't have to worry about where their next meal is coming from.

We know that 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, and that starts with ensuring that their basic needs are met.

We also believe that public universities play an important role in addressing the systemic causes of food insecurity, by giving students of every background an opportunity to attend a four-year university. We know that higher education often leads to more equitable outcomes and more stability later in life.

We know you are making difficult decisions this budget cycle, but we urge you to fully fund the PUSF at \$1.05 billion and increase Oregon's Opportunity Grant to \$400 million. This is a critical investment in our public universities and the students they serve.

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

Sincerely,
Ames Kessler-Templin
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon