



April 24th, 2023

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

Re: Please support full funding for Oregon's Public Universities

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

My name is Carmen Brewton Denison and I live in Portland, Oregon. I am the executive director of racial and education justice organization, Campus Compact of Oregon, an affiliate of Portland State University. 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.

Campus Compact of Oregon works to ensure that Oregonians from historically marginalized communities have access to the educational opportunities they need to thrive. It goes without saying that an equitable higher education system needed to ensure a bright future for our communities and the state as a whole. As an organization that supports institutions in shifting their practices to address the needs of Oregon's BIPOC, LGBTQ2SAI+, immigrant, migrant, and refugee communities, our office knows that public universities as the most likely to provide culturally responsive, inclusive, and justice-oriented educational to the communities that CCOR serves. Accordingly, the majority of the thousands of students that are served by our organization annually—as well as the BIPOC professionals that work in our office—attend, or graduated from, public universities. Many of these individuals are also first-generation college students, and of those, many are also first-generation Americans.

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.

Campus Compact of Oregon emphatically supports state investments in public universities for the following reasons:

- Oregon's public universities provide opportunities for all Oregon students, but they also serve as critical resources hubs. COVID-19 has presented students with challenges that require a holistic approach to student services, one that incorporates a wraparound approach; financial aid, academic support, career development, and basic needs support – including food and housing assistance, social-emotional support, and affinity-based, and identity-affirming educational spaces.
- The cost of higher education has made college inaccessible to most people; education should be a human right not a commodity only available to the wealthy. Public universities begin to fulfill the promise of equitable access opportunity, which is central to a just and healthy society. For this reason, one of the Oregon's greatest investments should be in its public universities. In this way, it invests in the futures of those who do not have the privilege and resources needed to afford college tuition. A \$1.05 billion budget will allow public universities to continue offering education and services for students without increasing tuition beyond 5 percent at most universities.
- A supported educational system produces a skilled and passionate workforce; Oregon has a workforce shortage. Increases support for public universities will ensure that our state has a growing population of skilled workers ready to meet the demands of emergent industries and rapidly changing economies.

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 Brewton Denison
Oregon Campus Compact