

Chair Lively, Vice-chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and members of the House Committee on Higher Education:

My name is Felicity Ratway. I am a Health Policy PhD student and graduate worker at Oregon State University. In addition to my work as a graduate research assistant, I piece together other work to make ends meet—a leadership role at a non-profit, a contract job as a health care interpreter, and a modest stipend for my hours spent working as union leadership within my labor union. I am here to express our support for HB 4162 on behalf of AFT-Oregon.

Many students in Oregon struggle to pay for critical resources like housing, food, and medicine. The low-wages earned by students have not kept up with the rising costs of tuition, textbooks, and other education-related expenses. This makes it difficult to stay in education long-term, instead of making the choice to halt higher education to spend those hours working to make ends meet. Students shouldn't have to choose between furthering their education and meeting their basic needs, but unfortunately this happens all too often.

It takes its toll on me, personally, but I have the privilege to be able to work multiple jobs to pay my bills. Many fellow students do not have that luxury. On my campus, I have heard from international students who are not allowed to work off-campus, students with disabilities who are not physically capable of working enough hours to earn the money to meet their basic needs, and students who have to juggle the cost of childcare on top of the cost of basic needs and education, all of whom have experienced a lack of access to basic needs as a result.

This legislature has already taken a critical step by investing in basic needs staff to direct students to existing resources, and I want to thank you for making that possible. However, these staff have identified a critical barrier: there simply aren't enough resources available to address the basic needs of the students they work with. This bill is a wise investment in the students of today and in Oregon's future.

Please take the next step forward and invest in resources to ensure basic needs can be met for Oregonian students. I urge your YES vote on HB 4162.

Felicity Ratway
Vice-President At Large
American Federation of Teachers - Oregon