

Submitter: Josselyn Studer
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Higher Education
Measure: HB4162

Chair Lively, Vice Chair Ruiz, Vice Chair McIntire, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Josselyn Studer. I am the Executive Secretary of Government Relations for the University of Oregon's student government and an intern for the Oregon Hunger Task Force. I stand before you today to express my support of HB 4162: The Student Emergency Needs Package, which will make critical investments in basic needs programming and affordable textbooks for students across Oregon.

Since childhood, I have held a steadfast belief that higher education is a gateway to a brighter future. My parents and grandmother, shaped by their own life journeys, echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the pivotal role of a college degree in obtaining financial and occupational success. Fueled by a fierce determination to break the cycle of limited opportunities, my parents fervently hoped I would realize the American Dream within the walls of academia.

I dedicated myself entirely to preparing for college. I excelled in my advanced classes, threw myself into extracurricular activities, and diligently saved every penny I earned since the age of 14, all so I could get into good schools with good scholarships. Despite my efforts, the overwhelming reality of college expenses proved far more formidable than anticipated.

Upon arriving at the University of Oregon, it became glaringly clear that basic necessities had become luxuries beyond the reach of many students. Situated in a food desert, the University of Oregon's campus leaves students with scant options for fresh and affordable food, with only high-priced grocery stores like Whole Foods and Market of Choice within reach. The absence of a campus food pantry further compounds this issue, leaving students to navigate lengthy distances to access assistance, only to find limited resources available for a mere four hours each week. Despite its immense limitations, the food pantry and its many Basic Needs program counterparts are a lifeline for students on campus. Yet they are critically underfunded and overextended. The entirety of U.O.'s basic needs program is funded through student fees. As a struggling first-generation student, how can my peers and I be expected to fully finance these programs when I can hardly afford my own basic needs?

By supporting the Student Emergency Needs Package, you invest in the 14,000 UO students who depend on essential aid programs annually and extend a lifeline to nearly 200,000 students across Oregon's public universities and community colleges. Among them are hundreds gathered here today for University Day, all striving to carve out a brighter future for themselves, their families, and Oregon.