



TO: House Committee on Higher Education
 FROM: Sammi Teo
 RE: Support for the Student Needs Emergency Package (HB 4162)
 DATE: February 8, 2024

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Ruiz and McIntire, and members of the committee,

Oregon Food Bank’s mission is “to eliminate hunger and its root causes.” We pursue this goal in two key ways: we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today, and we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty.

Oregon is in an ongoing hunger crisis. Last year, we saw 1.9 million visits to food assistance sites through the Oregon Food Bank Network – a 14% increase from the previous year. We are seeing peak-pandemic levels of demand right now. Oregon’s legislature is in a strong position to take action so that Oregonians can be free from hunger and our communities can thrive.

We cannot expect basic needs navigators to keep up with the impacts of increasingly expensive costs of living without investing in basic needs programming now.

The Student Emergency Needs Package (SENP) will make critical investments in Oregon’s Basic Needs Navigators and Textbook Affordability Program to help college students across Oregon to thrive. **Meeting students' basic needs yields multiplying benefits.** For example, food assistance for students [improves academic performance](#), [reduces chronic absenteeism](#), and leads to [decreased rates of depressive episodes, mental illness, and suicidal ideation](#). And **while Oregon’s new benefits navigators have reached more than 11,000 students since last April, navigators continue to struggle to meet student needs.** Navigators at smaller institutions and in rural areas especially cannot best serve students without programmatic budgets.

Costly housing, healthcare, and other living expenses coupled with the rising cost of tuition create great financial obstacles for students. These burdens are disproportionately felt by students from low-income backgrounds, those who are undocumented, those who have children, first-generation college students, and former foster youth. Due to the prevalence of basic needs insecurity among BIPOC students, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities, the Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education recommends continued support for this program as a key support for underrepresented students in higher education.

HB 4162 would help colleges and universities to:

- **Direct Student Aid:** providing housing/hotel vouchers, grocery store vouchers, transportation subsidies, childcare subsidies, emergency funds, etc.
- **Infrastructure Upgrades:** building food pantries, building community gardens, purchasing refrigeration, safety upgrades, etc.
- **Capacity Building:** hours expansions for food pantries, online ordering systems, etc.

We urge you to pass HB 4162. Thank you.

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