

February 7, 2025

Chair Huson, Vice Chair Fragala and Harbick, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Gayle Van Weerdhuizen, and I am the Benefits Navigator at Treasure Valley Community College (TVCC). I am writing in support of HB 3182 and HB 3183: The Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act, which will make important investments in student basic needs, affordable student housing, and textbook affordability initiatives.

Treasure Valley Community College serves three counties and five correctional facilities to meet the needs of a large service area and with a prevalent poverty rate. There is a significant homeless population that lives by the Snake River, and several partnering agencies that serve our houseless people that neighbor the college. Every workday I see, assist, or recommend services to students who are struggling with meeting basic needs. The Benefits Navigator/Basic Needs Oregon program relies heavily on donations and community support to serve our students with food, housing, transportation, technology, general personal care along with many other needs.

As I watch our nursing parenting students juggle coursework, jobs, and clinicals, as a Benefits Navigator I can support with pantry items and gas cards to make their part-time paycheck last a little longer. Gas cards and area food pantries also help the veteran who has tuition and books paid for but may not have enough money for groceries and gas to take care of his multigenerational family. Lastly, the houseless couple that have nowhere to go and no family support are now able to live in a motel until they finish college, hoping to find a living wage job. None of these students would still be in college if it were not for the support of the Basic Needs Oregon program.

The Benefits Navigator funding and Basic Needs Hubs on Oregon college campuses are vital to student success. At TVCC, our students need a safety net and support as they are dealing with many life challenges that can quickly sabotage their education. It is imperative for our labor force that the student completes college. Without their skills, our community will suffer with labor shortages in our local workforce, especially in the areas of nursing, emergency medical services, wildland fire, and agricultural management.

Thank you for your time, and I hope that I can count on your support of HB 3182 and HB 3183: The Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act. Our students with the MOST need and the most to gain will disappear from the community college setting if they have no support in meeting their basic needs.

Sincerely,

Gayle Van Weerdhuizen
TVCC Benefits Navigator