

Subject: Support Funding for 2025 Student Basic Needs Package and State-Wide Benefits Navigator Positions

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to urge you to support the 2025 Student Basic Needs Package, as well as continued funding for the state-mandated Benefits Navigator positions for the 2025-2027 biennium.

As a Benefits Navigator (“Resource Coordinator”) at Rogue Community College, I have witnessed firsthand the critical role this position plays in supporting student success and helping individuals access essential resources.

House Bill 2835 was enacted to address the pressing needs of students who face barriers to completing their education due to challenges such as food insecurity, housing instability, and limited access to health care. These issues significantly impact students' ability to stay enrolled, succeed academically, and transition into the workforce. By further investing in student basic needs programming and maintaining funding for these positions, the state demonstrates its commitment to removing barriers to education and fostering a thriving, skilled workforce.

In my role as a Benefits Navigator, I:

***Connect Students to Essential Resources:*** I help students access food pantries, housing assistance, childcare, and healthcare services, ensuring they can focus on their studies.

***Provide Tailored Support:*** Each student’s situation is unique. I work closely with individuals to navigate complex systems, including applying for public benefits like SNAP, TANF, and the Oregon Health Plan.

***Collaborate with Community Organizations:*** Through partnerships with local agencies, I bridge gaps between students and the resources they need, maximizing the impact of existing community supports.

The data underscores the importance of this work. At RCC, I personally have assisted over 1500 students in my time here so far, distributing gas cards, school supplies, Goodwill vouchers, student emergency funds, cafeteria gift cards, grocery cards, and supplies, advocacy and community connection for houseless students, meeting students where they are with their pressing basic needs. I helped to create the virtual [Advocacy and Resource Center](#), a webpage that links students to resources on campus and in the community, and serves as a community resource in itself. Over this past summer when our food pantry coordinator moved away, I volunteered to keep the food pantries going until we hired a full-time coordinator. Our Osprey Care Fund, the student emergency fund, has distributed nearly \$135,000 to over 350 students since its inception in 2019, and I have assisted in distributing most of those funds. I invite you to [click here](#) to see the 2024 Osprey Care Fund report that I assembled last year, giving statistics and telling actual student stories of why this emergency fund was so important in their lives. In 2023 and 2024 I coordinated a Poverty Simulation, facilitated by Steve Roe, to foster more

understanding of poverty within the community; plans are underway now for a 2025 Poverty Simulation.

Investing in Benefits Navigators aligns with Oregon's higher education goals and workforce development priorities. By addressing the non-academic challenges that disproportionately affect low-income and first-generation college students, we can close equity gaps, increase graduation rates, and bolster our local and state economies.

I understand that the state faces competing budget priorities, but funding these positions is a cost-effective strategy to ensure that taxpayer dollars invested in education yield the highest return. When students have access to the support they need, they are more likely to graduate, secure meaningful employment, and contribute positively to our communities.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like further information or additional specific stories from my work as a Benefits Navigator. I would also be happy to meet with you to discuss how this role impacts students in our district.

Thank you for your time and dedication to serving our community. I urge you to support the Student Basic Needs Package and advocate to keep Benefits Navigator positions funded for the 2025-2027 biennium. Your support is essential to ensuring all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Sincerely,

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