

TO: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
FROM: Loren Naldoza
RE: HB 3182, HB 3183: the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act
DATE: February 13, 2025



Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair Fragala, Vice-Chair Harbick, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act (HBs 3182, and 3183), which would make meaningful and targeted investments to assist college and university students in need to avoid food insecurity and housing instability.

Oregon Food Bank's mission is "to eliminate hunger and its root causes... *because no one should be hungry.*" 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. Unfortunately, hunger in Oregon continues to be on the rise. Last year alone, there were 2.5 million visits to Oregon Food Bank's network of free food markets, food pantries, and meal sites. This represents a 31 percent increase in visits across our network. At a time when more Oregonians are experiencing hunger, we urge the Legislature to pass measures that expand households' financial security, and that eliminate root causes of hunger.

Food and housing insecurity disproportionately impacts Oregon's students.

Oregon's college and university students continue to face starkly high financial challenges relative to the average household in our state. For example, a recent study conducted by Portland State University found that 19.1 percent of its student body had recently experienced homelessness, and the rate of those experiencing some degree of housing insecurity was 54.7 percent.¹ Additionally, a large proportion of students reported not being able to afford balanced meals (57.2 percent) and having to cut the size of meals or skip meals entirely because there was not enough money (44.3 percent). Observations of students experiencing food insecurity and housing instability is seen among Oregon's other academic institutions, according to a statewide student survey conducted by the Oregon Student Association.²

Schools, including PSU, have implemented a range of successful programs to address these high rates of food and housing insecurity. These include housing pilots, student emergency funds and assistance for SNAP-enrolled students that can be used for housing, and partnerships with local

¹ Jacen Greene, Greg Townley, Kenna Estell Dickard, and Desiree' J. DuBoise, *PSU Student Housing Insecurity Report*, December 2023, https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/hrac_pub/46/.

² Tiffany Camhi, OPB, *Affordable housing a primary concern for Oregon's college students*, Sept. 23, 2024, <https://www.opb.org/article/2024/09/23/affordable-housing-primary-concern-oregon-college-students>.

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organizations to provide affordable housing options. Many of these programs, however, have grappled with high rates of demand which current supply cannot meet.

HBs 3182 and 3183 would make a targeted and strategic investment of \$22 million to support students in three key areas:

[1] Support **Benefit Navigators** at Oregon’s colleges and universities with basic needs programming funding (\$10 million).

[2] Increase the availability of **affordable housing support and rental assistance** with the support of nonprofit organizations, such as College Housing Northwest (\$6.5 million). HB 3182 also stands up the Task Force on Student Housing, which would work over the interim to investigate barriers students face in accessing housing and to deliver additional recommendations to the Legislature.

[3] Supporting **Open Oregon Educational Resources**, Oregon’s statewide textbook availability program, to continue the expansion of no-cost/low-cost textbooks and course materials across Oregon’s colleges and universities (\$5.2 million).

No student in Oregon should go hungry, be housing insecure or houseless, or face other financial barriers that could jeopardize their academic outlook. The Legislature should continue to prioritize the well-being of students pursuing post-secondary education and workforce training by passing HB 3182 and HB 3183.

Sincerely,

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