

Date: February 13th, 2025

To: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

From: Nick Keough, Political and Legislative Organizer, AFT-Oregon

Re: Support for Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act (HB 3182 + HB 3183)

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

AFT-Oregon is a federation of 27 local unions representing 18,000 education workers across early learning, K-12 classified, community colleges, and public universities. Our membership includes faculty, academic professionals, classified staff, and childcare workers in both public and private sectors.

Today, our labor federation is writing to express our enthusiastic support of HB 3182 and HB 3183, the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act. If passed, these bills would make a targeted and strategic investment of about \$22 million in three key areas:

- Benefits Navigator Programming Expansions:
 - \$10 million dollars to support Benefits Navigator programming at Oregon's colleges and universities with funding to expand basic needs support programs, infrastructure, and personnel.
- Affordable Student Housing Initiatives:
 - \$6.5 million to support non-profits in Oregon that are providing access to affordable housing and rental assistance for low-income students
 - The creation of a Student Housing Task Force to investigate barriers to affordable student housing and recommend policy changes that increase student access.
- Textbook Affordability and Open Educational Resources:
 - \$5.2 million to Oregon's statewide textbook affordability program, Open Oregon Educational Resources, to expand no-cost and low-cost textbooks and course

materials across Oregon's colleges and universities.

At AFT-Oregon, our members witness daily how housing insecurity, food insecurity, and financial instability impact students' ability to succeed. When students are forced to choose between rent, food, and textbooks, their academic performance suffers and their chances of making it to graduation decrease. Educators and student support staff are often the first to hear about student's struggles – when a student asks for an extension because they lost their housing or when they stop showing up to class because they can't afford transportation.

While students are the most deeply impacted, this issue is not just about students – it is also about the faculty and staff who work alongside them. Many of the same basic needs resources that support students – such as campus food pantries and basic needs centers – have also been utilized by faculty and staff. The reality is that many of Oregon's educators and campus workers, particularly adjunct faculty and classified staff, face the same economic pressures as their students. Investing in these programs helps the entire campus community by ensuring that both students and employees have the support they need to thrive.

Another important aspect of addressing student basic needs is its direct connection to campus and classroom safety. When students experience housing or food insecurity, they are far more likely to experience chronic stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. By expanding access to basic needs resources and affordable housing, this bill would help stabilize students' lives, improving their mental well-being and overall health. Thus, investing in student stability isn't just about academic success; it's a direct investment in making campuses and classrooms safer, healthier places to learn and work.

Finally, ensuring students has access to affordable textbooks and course materials should be a core part of a comprehensive affordability strategy for post-secondary education in Oregon. The Open Oregon Educational Resources (OER) grant program has financially supported faculty in developing and adopting no-cost and low-cost textbooks, reducing financial barriers for students. Expanding and sustaining the OER program ensure that students don't have to sacrifice food or rent to afford the materials they need to succeed academically.

In closing, AFT-Oregon strongly supports the four key provisions in the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act: investments in student basic needs programming, expanded access to affordable student housing, the creation of a Student Housing Task Force, and increased funding for textbook affordability and Open Educational Resources. Together, these targeted investments will help ensure that Oregon's students have the stability, support, and resources they need to succeed in higher education.

We urge the legislature to pass HB 3182 and HB 3183: the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Signed,

AFT-Oregon

<https://www.aft-oregon.org/about-aft-oregon>