

My name is Kayla Cho, a student at the University of Oregon, and a Peer Leader in the Summer Bridge Program that was funded by Strong Start. I am writing in support of SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities, which will continue funding for programs that help ease the transition to higher education by providing an early start and giving them access to additional resources.

Being part of the Catalyst track in the Summer Bridge Program was an invaluable experience—one that not only shaped my college journey but also allowed me to impact others in a meaningful way. From the start, I had the opportunity to mentor a group of five students, all from diverse backgrounds, who arrived at the University of Oregon with a mix of excitement and uncertainty. Many of them had no idea what to expect from college. They were shy, full of questions, and, in some cases, nervous about whether they would fit in or find a supportive community.

Through Summer Bridge, I witnessed their transformation firsthand. In a short time, these students built friendships, grew in confidence, and found a sense of belonging. I saw their initial worries—about academics, social life, and adjusting to a new environment—gradually ease as they connected with one another and embraced the resources available to them.

The true impact of the program became clear to me later in the fall. While volunteering with the University of Oregon Chemistry and Biochemistry Department, I ran into some of the students I had mentored in the Summer Bridge Program. They were still friends, still studying together, and still supporting each other. Seeing them thrive, knowing that they had a strong foundation from Summer Bridge, made me realize just how lasting the program's influence was.

Beyond simply preparing students for college, Summer Bridge fosters a network of support that extends well beyond those first few weeks. Some of my mentees have reached out for guidance on getting involved in undergraduate research, building academic connections, and succeeding in their studies. That's what makes this program so special—it doesn't just help students start college; it helps them build a future.

I am grateful for my experience with the Summer Bridge Program because it is deeply committed to student success. The program not only equips students with resources but also creates a welcoming community that empowers them to thrive. Watching students grow from uncertainty to confidence has been one of the most rewarding parts of my college experience, and I am proud to have played a role in their journey.

Please continue funding and expanding the Strong Start Program so that more students can benefit from its impactful services. Your leadership and commitment to education will help ensure that Oregon's public universities remain places of opportunity, inclusion, and achievement. Thank you for your time, and I hope I can count on your support of SB 604, the Strong Start Program!

Sincerely,
Kayla Cho
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