

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee,

My name is Will, and I am a student at Portland State University. I am writing in support of SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities, which will continue funding for programs that give underrepresented students the support they need to find success as they start their journey in higher education by giving them an early start and providing additional resources to get them off on the right track.

Growing up in Raleigh NC, I was a "gifted kid," and put into accelerated programs that heavily favored strong test scores and the kind of pattern recognition that I am skilled at. I breezed through most of grade school doing very little work and relied on my testing and recall capabilities, and did not gain many notetaking or study skills. This did not translate well into the public high school I went to when my family moved to California, where most of the grading was process based, and both my grades and self worth plummeted. I ended up applying to PSU with a 2.98 unweighted gpa, which wasn't enough to get into many of the universities I had envisioned myself in throughout my childhood.

I was accepted with the requirement that I participate in the Summer Scholars program, to learn some study skills and to get used to college level work, and at first I was devastated. I saw this as a personal failing, and as a pretty stubborn person, I hated the idea that I needed extra help. Despite entering the program with the assumption that it would be useless, I credit it as the reason I am still in college today. The first friends that I made at PSU, most of whom I am still close friends with, years later, were in this program with me, many with similar stories. In the program I learned some study skills, and some strategies for working on long term goals, but what ended up being the most valuable was just understanding the resources available to me from the university, that I would otherwise be oblivious to. I have since been diagnosed with ADHD, which I would likely not have even recognized had it not been for one of my mentors in the Summer Scholars program, and I have been flourishing at PSU against all odds.

I have gone on to join the student government at PSU (ASPSU), and have helped advocate for other students the way Summer Scholars advocated for me. I have also started working for the university as a Resident Assistant, where I work to create the best possible environment for my residents, often with tools I gained in the Summer Scholars program. I

implore you to support the strong start program, to continue to give students in the following generations the opportunity to succeed. This comes at a time when many students are scared they will lose federal aid, when many programs are at risk of cuts or being completely dissolved, and when incoming students may not have the same support structures that have helped previous generations of students. Statewide support for these initiatives can help reassure students that their local government will have their back.

Thank you for your time, and I hope I can count on your support of SB 604, the Strong Start Program!

Sincerely,

Will Scholz