

February 18, 2025

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

My name is Kim Lilley, Strong Start Grant Administrator at the University of Oregon. I write today encouraging you to support SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities to provide continued funding for programs that ease the transition from high school to higher education.

In the last 4 years, the Strong Start program here at the University of Oregon (Summer Bridge) has supported more than 2414 incoming first-year students ready to begin their academic journey. These are low-income, first-generations and/or underrepresented students, many from rural communities with minimal exposure to the higher education process. Strong support and guidance is game-changing for disadvantaged students!

UO Summer Bridge participants develop a sense of belonging, build communities, create academic opportunities, connect with faculty mentors and flourish as UO undergraduates. These students thrive and are retained at levels that exceed other incoming first-year students.

The higher education landscape can be daunting for incoming students. Strong Start offers incredible resources, faculty support, mentoring and a sense of belonging that is transformative for program participants. I strongly encourage your continued support for Strong Start funding to serve young adults across Oregon. They need this now more than ever! I appreciate your efforts to make this a priority today.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kim Lilley".

Kim Lilley
University of Oregon
Springfield, OR