

My name is Taylor Gates, a student at the University of Oregon, and a participant 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.

As a student from a low-income family, I was really scared to go to college. I was not sure if I would make any friends or how I was going to adjust to the life of a college student. No one in my immediate family had completed college, so I was quite discouraged. Then as I was filling out my registration for the University of Oregon, I came across the Summer Bridge application. A whole program dedicated to helping first-year students to succeed in specialized tracks. I was lucky enough to be in the North Star Summer Bridge program and I was terrified the first day. Then I met my leader Cristina, she answered all our questions and was so nice and caring. Then the week started. We met new people, built robots, explored campus, and even went off-campus and did team bonding activities like white water rafting. The whole experience turned college from a scary, uncertain place to a place full of laughter and friends. When we took a trip to go rafting, I chose a raft with a few people I met, and that same raft gave me my college friend group. Even in term 2, we all text and grab dinner together when we can. Many of us even ended up in classes together. My friend Ewan, from that raft, is my coding partner in my CS 210 class. Not only was Summer Bridge able to break me out of my shell, but every day they would give us a class on different skills we needed to get through our first year of college. Many of the skills I use every day, like using a planner, finding sources on campus like the Tutoring and Academic Engagement Center, and many others. Even after our program ended, Summer Bridge always sent us updates and reminders of important events and deadlines we needed to know. My first term at UO was extremely challenging. I fell ill, ended up in the ER multiple times, and had to spend the last month of the term at home recovering to come back. This made me end up with 3 incompletes and I was not sure how to continue. However, since I was in Summer Bridge I knew exactly what resources on campus could help me with my new struggle. I submitted work to the online writing lab, I reached out to advisors, and I even learned how to withdraw from a class because of the continued support and reminders Summer Bridge gave me. I am unsure what my college life would look like now without Summer Bridge. I think I would have been stuck in my illness if I was not given the resources Summer Bridge provided me. My biggest advice to my younger friends starting college, has been to join programs like Summer Bridge. I hope programs like this will be able to continue to run to help the kids who are scared to speak up for themselves. Although most college students are adults, the first year can feel like trying to learn to walk again. Which is why I will always be eternally grateful to Summer Bridge and their team for always helping me find my balance.

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,

Taylor Gates

University of Oregon

Woodburn, Oregon