

Submitter: Alissa Leavitt
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

Dear Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Oregon Senate Education Committee,

My name is Alissa Leavitt, MPH, MCHES, and I am an adjunct instructor at Portland State University and an instructor at Portland Community College. I am also a proud graduate of Portland State University (BS '05, MPH '07). In my role at PSU, I have had the privilege of teaching in the Transfer Summer Scholars and First Year Summer Scholars programs, where I've seen firsthand how impactful early support can be for students transitioning into higher education. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 604, the Strong Start Program at Oregon's public universities, which provides underrepresented students with the resources they need to succeed from day one.

Many of the students I've worked with in the Summer Scholars programs are first-generation college students who often balance work, family responsibilities, and financial challenges. Without programs like Strong Start, many of them would begin their college journey without the crucial academic preparation, peer connections, and institutional knowledge that are crucial for success. These summer bridge experiences offer more than just coursework—they build confidence, foster belonging, and equip students with practical skills like time management and financial literacy.

As a first-generation college graduate myself, I understand how transformative these programs can be. Strong Start doesn't just support individual students; it strengthens our communities by ensuring more students persist, graduate, and contribute to Oregon's workforce. Research consistently shows that early interventions lead to higher retention and completion rates, making programs like Strong Start a wise investment for our state.

I urge you to continue funding and expanding the Strong Start Program through SB 604. Your support will ensure that Oregon's public universities remain places of opportunity, inclusion, and achievement for all students, regardless of background.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to higher education and hope you will support this critical initiative.

Sincerely,

Alissa Leavitt, MPH, MCHES
Adjunct Instructor, Portland State University
Instructor, Portland Community College
Portland, Oregon