

Submitter: Kodee Harwood  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Strong Start Bill (Senate Bill 604). I graduated from Western Oregon University this past June and had the honor of serving as a Destination Western Peer Advisor for incoming students. As a first-generation college graduate, I know firsthand how essential this bill is in providing students with the support and resources they need to successfully complete college.

As a Destination Western Peer Advisor, I worked closely with incoming students and witnessed the profound impact this program has on their transition to college. Destination Western provides students—particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds—with the tools and guidance necessary to begin their college journey with confidence. Through early access to academic resources, mentorship, and community-building opportunities, the program fosters a sense of belonging before the academic year even begins.

I have personally seen students arrive feeling anxious and uncertain about college. Through Destination Western, they develop meaningful connections with peers, faculty, and staff, making them more likely to persist and succeed in their first year. The structure and support this program provides are critical to improving student retention and success rates at Western Oregon University.

The Strong Start Bill plays a vital role in ensuring programs like Destination Western continue to receive the funding they need to serve incoming students. By investing in early support initiatives, Oregon is making a commitment to student success and higher graduation rates. Without this funding, many students may not have access to the crucial resources that help them navigate the transition to higher education.

I now work in higher education and see firsthand how early support programs impact not only individual students but also overall enrollment and retention rates. Supporting Senate Bill 604 is an investment in the future of Oregon's students, institutions, and workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Kodee Harwood  
Western Oregon University