

Submitter: Iris De Lis
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

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

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony in support of SB 604. My name is Iris De Lis, and I am a student at Portland State University. I am also a staff member here, and I teach courses, as well. 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.

I have been impressed and deeply moved by the incredible impact this program has on our Strong Start Program students. Some of these students have shared with me that they would not have been able to attend college and/or stay in college were it not for this program. It has truly been a program that bridges the gap from their experiences in high school to the very different set of experiences and expectations in college.

This is close to my heart as I grew up in a large family in near poverty in a small, rural agricultural town. I don't recall college ever being talked about in our home growing up as neither of my parents attended. I don't think they could imagine a world in which any of their children would be able to attend college. After being very fortunate to find solid employment with only a high school diploma, I eventually made it back to college—decades later—and got my undergrad degree at PSU, followed by my master's. I am now awaiting word on my doctoral program application. It has been a decades-long slog to get here, and there were many times I didn't think it would ever happen. Having a program like Strong Start would have made all the difference for me as a first-gen transfer student who didn't do well in high school.

We have the opportunity as a State to live up to the values we profess at a moment when that feels more important than ever—and more under threat than ever. Offering these brilliant scholars not only the opportunity that they deserve, but the education and contributions that our cities, counties, and state, not to mention our country, so desperately need is the right thing to do. It would be heartbreaking to see the tremendous good and success that the Strong Start program is seeing be cut short and taken away from communities to which it has brought so much.

Thank you for your time, and I hope I can count on your support of SB 604, the Strong Start Program! Please know that I am glad to talk with you any time about this

and to do all I can to ensure this Strong Start continues to fuel a strong future for the State of Oregon and beyond.

Sincerely -
Iris De Lis