

*Support of Senate Bill 604,
Senate Committee On Education,
Oregon State Legislature*

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

My name is Christina Dorofeev, and I am an undergraduate student at the University of Oregon. I am writing in support of Oregon Senate Bill 604 to continue funding the Strong Start Program. I do so not only as a student who personally benefited from this program but also as someone who returned as a peer leader to support and mentor new students. I have seen and experienced firsthand the impact of Strong Start, both in my own academic journey and in the experiences of others. This program does far more than help students transition into college. It provides them with the tools, confidence, and research experiences they need to thrive in STEM.

The first weeks of college are a defining moment. Many students, especially those entering STEM, feel overwhelmed and uncertain if they belong. I know this because I was one of them. Strong Start changed that for me as it provided me with hands-on research experiences, faculty mentorship, and most importantly, a community that made me believe I could succeed. Before my first term even began, I had already worked on real scientific projects, built a telescope, and collaborated with peers and mentors who encouraged me along the way. This early foundation of experience and support has carried me through the challenges of my degree and solidified my passion for research and outreach.

That is why I returned as a peer leader to give back to the program that made such a difference in my educational career. I watched students arrive feeling hesitant and unsure, yet excited to explore the possibilities that college held for them. Through Strong Start, they gained confidence as they built robotics projects, engaged in problem-solving, and tackled real scientific challenges. They formed meaningful connections with mentors and peers who believed in them. Research consistently shows that early exposure, hands-on learning, and community support are critical to student retention, particularly for those from underrepresented backgrounds. Strong Start provides all three. Without it, many talented students will struggle, disengage, and ultimately leave STEM, not because they lack ability, but because they lack the support that Strong Start provides.

Eliminating this program would be a devastating loss, not just for individual students, but for Oregon's future in science, technology, and innovation. The Strong Start Program is an investment in our next generation of physicists, engineers, and problem-solvers. It is an investment in equity, in opportunity, and in the future of STEM itself.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 604 and ensure that Strong Start remains a vital resource for students, just as it was for me. Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to Oregon's students.

Sincerely,
Christina Dorofeev
University of Oregon