

Submitter: Shondra Russell

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce  
Development

Measure, Appointment or  
Topic: HB2997

I have proudly called Salem, Oregon, home for over 25 years, and I am writing to you today solely in my capacity as a private citizen—not in any official role. The views expressed are my own and do not reflect those of my employer, my program, or any affiliated institution.

For identification purposes only, I am also the Director of the TRIO Upward Bound Program at Western Oregon University, where I have served for 19 years. In that time, I have seen firsthand the transformative impact of TRIO programs across the state. Supporting students from low-income backgrounds, as well as those whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree, has never been more important.

Every day, I work with high school students, and since the COVID-19 pandemic, I have witnessed a noticeable decline in academic preparedness. Yet, despite the many barriers they face, these students continue to show resilience, determination, and a strong desire to succeed. They have the potential to thrive—they just need the right support. They “show up,” and as a state, we must show up for them.

TRIO programs work. Their positive impact is not only life-changing for individual students but also generational, benefiting families and communities across Oregon. I am proud to stay connected with graduates of the WOU TRIO Upward Bound Program who have earned their college degrees and now have children of their own in high school and college. Thanks to the support they once received, they are now able to guide and encourage the next generation. Many TRIO alumni are now working in higher education across Oregon in critical roles—such as financial aid, advising, admissions, business services, and housing—helping countless students navigate their own paths to success.

HB 2997 builds on the progress of HB 5006 and HB 2412, strengthening our investment in organizations that provide essential college access and success programs. Sustained and equitable funding through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) is necessary to ensure long-term stability.

I urge you to support HB 2997 to ensure these vital programs remain accessible to students across Oregon. Your support is crucial in providing life-changing opportunities for students throughout our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.