

## Testimony Template for HB2997

Good morning, Chair Hudson, Vice Chairs Fragala and Harbick, and members of the committee,

My name is Teresa Alonso Leon, and I am a former State Representative and former Chair of the House Higher Education Committee, I am now a business owner and work as a consultant and lobbyist for CAPACES Leadership Institute and I am the program lead of the Oregon Community Table on Postsecondary Education and Training which is a statewide advocacy group that I helped form to help transform our postsecondary education system to better meet the needs of our underserved and underrepresented students.

I represent close to 100 members across the state who identified HB2997 as a policy we want passed during this session. HB2997 is the policy that aims to establish a permanent grant fund within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for the purpose of supporting organizations that expand the scope and community reach of college access and success programs for underserved Oregon students.

In 2021 with the help of the HECC, community partners and OSA, we passed HB2590 and in 2022, the Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education (JTUSHE) officially got implemented with eight legislators being assigned to the Task Force. Much work occurred between March and July of 2022.

The Task Force conducted two-day sight visits to nine community colleges and universities as well as a few virtual site visits to correctional facilities and other education institutions across the states. One of the key parts of the site visits were the round table discussions with students, classified staff, faculty and leaders in postsecondary education. We also conducted public hearings and virtual monthly meetings to discuss postsecondary education topics. In addition, we formed three workgroups to focus on policy development related to financial aid and affordability, Student Support and wraparound Services and Systemic Accountability and continuous improvement.

Among our conversations with students in our roundtable discussions, we constantly heard from students on how impactful their experiences were who participated in programs like TRIO, AVID and College Possible, they indicated how the variety of services helped them access, retain and complete college and appreciated the transition experience from high school to college. Which can be a great challenge for students and families of first generation students. Further, students who did not go through these programs shared that they wished to have had these programs in their high school or learned about the college programs sooner.

Oregon is three decades behind in fully funding postsecondary education. This means that students who want study beyond earning their GED or graduating with a high school diploma regardless of what people want to study(the trades, career technical education, two year

degrees or beyond) is getting even more difficult when you combine all the societal challenges that young people and adults students are now experiencing like food and housing insecurity child care desserts and the cost of books. As a state I believe we need to start prioritizing our students, especially our underserved and underrepresented students in postsecondary higher education, they desperately need our help both financially and with wrap around services so they can complete and graduate with certificates and degrees.

Funding HB2590 will allow for these programs to grow and serve even more students in Oregon, further it will allow for postsecondary education programs and community based organizations to apply for funding so they can help more students receive the wrap around services needed to help more students go and graduate from postsecondary education.

Thank you for your time, and I hope that I can count on your support of HB2997.