

I am writing to strongly support HB 2997, which will establish a designated grant fund within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to support college access and success programs for underrepresented students in Oregon.

As the Director of two TRIO - Student Support Services programs at Portland State University and educator for the past 30 years, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that college access and success programs, such as TRIO, have on students striving to achieve higher education. These programs provide essential guidance, financial aid navigation, academic support, and mentorship that empower students to persist and graduate. For many, these resources are the difference between successfully completing a degree and facing insurmountable barriers.

With the additional support of the Oregon TRIO Association, we have provided scholarships to our students who have exhausted their financial aid in their last year. These scholarships have played a critical role in ensuring that students can complete their degrees without the added burden of financial insecurity. The Oregon TRIO Association has also provided professional development opportunities to the TRIO staff to better serve our students, such as trauma-informed care and supporting students in completing the Better FAFSA.

Students from historically marginalized backgrounds often face significant obstacles in accessing and completing college, including financial constraints, lack of familial support in higher education, and systemic inequities. Programs like TRIO serve as a crucial bridge, offering tailored support that helps students navigate these challenges. Without sustained funding, many students risk losing access to the critical resources that enable them to succeed academically and professionally.

Investing in community-based college access programs is an investment for individual students and Oregon's future workforce and economic growth. Ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to attain a college degree is essential for fostering a more equitable and prosperous society.

I urge you to support HB 2997 to ensure these vital programs continue serving students across Oregon. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda Liu, MA

TRIO - SSS Director