

February 27, 2025

Dear Oregon House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development:

I am writing to express my unwavering support for the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act and would strongly encourage the Oregon legislature to pass HB3182 and HB3183. I can't think of a more impactful investment in the future economic vitality of our great state and its residents. According to [research](#) by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 71% of job openings across Oregon between 2021 and 2031 will require postsecondary credentials. Meanwhile based on data from the [US Census American Community Survey](#), there were 442,000 Oregonians in 2023 between 25 and 54 years old lacking a postsecondary degree that were either unemployed or working earning \$15 an hour or less. While many policymakers and business leaders naturally consider youth and the emerging workforce as the primary strategy to address the current and future talent needs of employers, it would take approximately 9 years of Oregon high school graduates to equate to the number of adults who could benefit from postsecondary education right now to build and sustain a multi-skilled workforce across the state.

In order for adults 25 and older to continue to access and complete quality postsecondary education opportunities, higher education institutions have worked diligently to address the foundational needs of these learners so they can focus on their studies. According to the latest [Student Basic Needs Survey Report](#) from the Hope Center for Student Basic Needs at Temple University, released this past week, 59% of the 74,000 higher education students surveyed across the country experienced at least one form of basic needs insecurity related to food or housing. Furthermore, 73% of students experienced basic needs insecurity when other foundation needs were included such as childcare, mental health, transportation and/or internet/technology access. What is even more striking is that 65% of students reported that they lacked awareness about available supports and 51% of students who experienced at least one type of basic needs insecurity did not receive any public benefits.

These stark realities that today's community college and university students face impede their ability to enroll in, persist, and complete postsecondary education programs that lead to jobs and careers with economic mobility. From my experience leading and supporting community college workforce development, career technical education, adult education and career pathways programs at three Oregon community colleges for over thirteen years, plus the last five years doing national work addressing student basic need insecurity as a consultant across the country, I would offer that Oregon as a state has been an incredible trailblazer passing groundbreaking legislation (HB2835) in 2021 to fund Benefit Navigators across all 17 community colleges and 7 public universities. Oregon was the first state in the country to do so with other states following our lead in trying to pass similar student-centered legislation to help address the unprecedented number of students experiencing basic need insecurity with assistance to navigate and access public benefits and resources. I have had the opportunity to present on the Oregon Benefit Navigator program in national networks and have had individuals

across multiple states inquire about it. Just earlier this week, I joined a group of leaders from six Great Lakes states strategizing on policies that can address student basic needs insecurity all discussing Benefit Navigators as a priority with Oregon's model being highlighted and looked at as a best practice. Sadly, a national policy expert pointed out that the funding for Benefit Navigators in Oregon is currently in jeopardy and the lessons learned from Oregon are more a word of caution on how a trailblazing successful investment and model can fail when there is not a state commitment to sustainability and growth.

Having been an active part of the coalition of community colleges, universities, anti-poverty organizations, student associations, community-based organizations and human service agencies that came together collectively to advocate and support the passage of HB2835, and observing the implementation, advancement and most importantly the positive impact that these critical positions have had on student success, I feel even more compelled to provide testimony in support of these bills. The Benefit Navigators across the state have seen up close what the unmet needs of students are over the past few years. They have worked miracles connecting students to SNAP Employment and Training benefits, housing and childcare resources, when available, emergency funds to cover utilities, transportation and other imminent needs. Unfortunately they have not had sufficient resources to address the multitude of financial realities students face. In turn, this has affected students abilities to continue forward with their academic studies. The passage of the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act would provide the programmatic support for Benefit Navigators to address these urgent barriers students face across the state, in addition to needed investments in student housing and reducing student textbook costs through Open Education Resources.

I would implore you to take the time and truly listen to the oral and written testimony of higher education students across the state as they describe their lived experiences facing basic needs insecurity, the resources that have been most helpful to them, and what limitations exist in addressing their basic needs as students. I have had the honor of interviewing a number of Oregon community college students over the past three years through the [All In: Student Pathways Forward podcast](#), which was created to elevate the voices of Oregon community college students to shape inclusive policies, programs and partnerships. Some Oregon legislators in the past have listened in to episodes featuring students from the college(s) in their district to hear a more in depth description of students' experiences, that is complementary to the 2-3 minute eloquent testimony students have offered. It is difficult for me to capture in words the determination, courage, vulnerability, clarity, thoughtfulness, and tenacity of these students as they navigate different challenging systems and realities in their unwavering pursuit of postsecondary education credentials towards a better future for them and their families. Students I have interviewed have conveyed clearly the powerful impact that Benefit Navigators have had in helping them address various basic needs, connecting them with public benefits and college and community resources. Benefit Navigators have made a huge difference on student success throughout Oregon. The continued state investment in the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act will sustain and scale this nationally recognized, innovative, and student-centered strategy that directly improves student success and statewide economic vitality.

In summary, along with higher education students, college and university faculty, staff and administrators, anti-poverty organizations, community-based organizations, and human service agencies, I would ask you to remain committed to accessible quality postsecondary education opportunities for all Oregonians as the primary path to careers with economic mobility by passing the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act.

Sincerely,

Marc Goldberg

Marc Goldberg
Portland, OR
Constituent, Senate District 23 & House District 45