

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

My name is Hannah Smith, and I am a BSW student at Portland State University. I am also both a Benefits Navigator Intern at and alumni of Clackamas Community College. I am writing in support of HB 3182 and HB 3183: The Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act, which will make important investments in student basic needs initiatives, affordable student housing initiatives, and textbook affordability.

I graduated from CCC in 2019 which was before Benefits Navigators existed. I completed the Medical Assistant program which required a 400-hour externship that was unpaid and 40 hours a week for a whole term. I completed the program, but in the process, I became burnt out as I worked on the weekends on top of my externship. Also, I struggled to pay bills and often shopped at Dollar Tree for food. I didn't have very much knowledge about the resources available to me and the stigma around state assistance like SNAP, prevented my family from even considering this as an option. Bottom line, I know what it feels like to be without a Benefits Navigator. Now, I get to be on the other end of things. I help students get connected to resources so they can be successful in completing college and move into careers with living wages. As an intern, I am still learning but I have already witnessed the immense impact that Helen Paz, the Benefits Navigator at CCC, has on students. She creates a safe and non-judgmental space and connects students to resources that they would otherwise be in the dark about. Such as housing and utilities assistance, SNAP and OHP, grants for class materials, transportation, childcare, DV resources, and much more.

I am advocating for The Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act because all students deserve a fair chance to education without having to worry about being evicted, when their next meal will be, not having reliable transportation, or their wi-fi going out in the middle of finals. Many students are one unmet basic need away from dropping out. Additionally, many students are parents, caretakers, frontline workers, commuters, patients, survivors, and much more. Addressing student basic needs is also addressing socioeconomic inequalities and opportunity gaps. And when you invest in students, you also invest in families and communities.

Thank you for your time, and I hope that I can count on your support of HB 3182 and HB 3183: The Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act. Students cannot wait any longer!

Sincerely,

Hannah Smith, CCMA