

Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Sanchez, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Sophie Elliott and I am the Benefits Navigator at Central Oregon Community College. I am here today to speak in support of HB 3182 and HB 3183, the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act.

Throughout my time as the benefits navigator I have seen firsthand how much the basic needs programs on campus have positively impacted students by walking alongside them in their journeys. I have helped students navigate the complexities of being a full time student in need of affordable housing, helped a student get access to tuition assistance through the Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program, provided several students with gas cards to get to and from campus, and so much more. These are just a few examples of student's unique situations. The basic needs programs have provided so much hope to students and we need hope now more than ever.

At COCC we have served 6,000 students at our Bend Campus food bank, and our branch campuses, which are in more rural areas, and are in constant need. Hundreds of students have visited our clothing connection, 59 students have received gas cards, with the need being much higher, and around 50 students per term have gotten help through our Benefits Navigator partnership- and this is not including repeat students, students who are referred to other programs, or one time email contacts.

Students cannot be successful in their classes if their basic needs are not being met. Plain and simple. There are so many factors outside of the classroom that can make it hard for students to focus, like unexpected injuries, a loss of a job, loss of childcare, and so much more. We all know how impossible it is to try and focus when our stomach is grumbling, let alone when other outside factors are weighing on us. Student needs and the programs that exist to support them are not new. They have been around for a long time and many students count on them to succeed. In order to set our students up for success and be prepared to join our workforce, we need to make sure that they have access to the resources that they need. I hope that you will take all of this into consideration when deliberating.

Thank you for your time, and I hope I can count on your support of the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act.