

Submitter: Bryanah Lopez
On Behalf Of: United Indigenous Students in Higher Education
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5525

Personal Testimony in Support of the Oregon Tribal Student Grant

My name is Bryanah Lopez, and I am an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. I am currently a full time student at Portland State University, where I serve as the lead coordinator for United Indigenous Students in Higher Education (UISHE). I'm writing today to urge you to protect and continue funding the Oregon Tribal Student Grant — a program that is not only essential for my education, but for the futures of many Indigenous students across this state.

Indigenous people have some of the lowest rates of enrollment and graduation in higher education nationwide. These statistics are not a reflection of our capabilities or our desire to learn — they are the result of centuries of systemic barriers, underfunded schools, intergenerational trauma, and ongoing colonial structures that continue to marginalize our communities. The Oregon Tribal Student Grant helps level the playing field. It creates access where there has long been exclusion, and it gives students like me the chance to pursue our goals without being crushed by debt or systemic disadvantage.

My passion for education and advocacy comes from my grandmother, Kathryn Jones Harrison, who played a vital role in fighting for the restoration of both the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. She worked tirelessly to regain federal recognition for our people after termination — a policy that stripped our tribes of our sovereignty, our land, and our rights. Her efforts helped restore our political and cultural presence, ensuring that future generations — including me — would have access to opportunities that were once taken from us. She didn't just fight for policy change; she fought for the survival and dignity of our people. The Oregon Tribal Student Grant is a continuation of that fight — it is part of the legacy she helped create. Every time I step into a classroom, lead a meeting, or help another Indigenous student find their voice, I carry her work forward. Now, as an upcoming tribal leader and student leader, I've been able to grow United Indigenous Students in Higher Education (UISHE) from just four members to fifteen. I've organized events like the Annual Naimuma Powwow — the largest student-led event at Portland State University. This isn't something PSU staff or paid event planners put on. It's entirely volunteer-based and led by Indigenous students for our community. Without the Oregon Tribal Student Grant, I wouldn't be in college to lead UISHE, and events like the Naimuma Powwow likely wouldn't exist. Many of the Indigenous students who help make this happen rely on this grant just to be here. UISHE also serves as a cultural and educational hub — we bring our community together through knowledge-sharing, cultural practice, and peer support. But none of

this would be possible without the continued support of the Oregon Tribal Student Grant.

This grant is not just financial aid — it's a recognition that Indigenous students belong in higher education, that we deserve the chance to thrive. Eliminating this program would be a devastating step backward for our communities. It would not only limit our futures, but dishonor the generations who fought for us to be here in the first place. Please, stand with Indigenous students. Continue funding the Oregon Tribal Student Grant. Give us the tools to succeed in a system that was never built for us — because we're not just surviving in it, we're changing it.

Hayu Masi (Many Thanks)

Sincerely,?

Bryanah Lopez?

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

?Student at Portland State University?

Lead Coordinator, United Indigenous Students in Higher Education (UISHE)