

Testimony in Support of HB 2997

Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg & Smith, and members of the committee,

My name is Amber Alves, and I am a proud TRIO alum and current professional working in a TRIO program. I am writing in strong support of HB 2997, which will establish a designated grant fund within HECC to support college access and success programs for underserved students in Oregon.

As a non-traditional, first-generation, low-income student from a blue-collar family, I faced tremendous barriers in trying to access and complete a college education. I attempted to start college multiple times but struggled without the guidance of someone who truly understood how to navigate higher education. That changed when I found the TRIO Educational Opportunity Center (EOC).

TRIO became my lifeline. They supported me through the confusing financial aid process, helped me complete the FAFSA, navigate additional paperwork, apply for scholarships, and regain my footing in college. With their help, I went from only planning to earn an associate's degree to setting my sights on a bachelor's—and achieving it. I transferred to a university and continued with TRIO through the Student Support Services (SSS) program, eventually becoming a student ambassador and co-founding the TRIO-SSS student club on campus.

TRIO didn't just help me academically; it shaped who I am. It gave me self-confidence, determination, adaptability, and strength. These programs taught me how to advocate for myself and others, and instilled a deep belief that I belonged in higher education.

Today, I am earning a Master's degree while working full time in the very program that once uplifted me. I have the privilege of helping other students who share my background and barriers—and I know firsthand just how life-changing these services are.

Sustainable funding for TRIO and similar community-based programs is essential. These programs aren't just helpful; they are transformative. Without them, many students will lose critical support that could mean the difference between dropping out and graduating.

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

Sincerely,

Amber Alves

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