

April 17, 2025

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

My name is Tamam Waritu, and I am a **TRIO alumnus**, national speaker, and student success trainer. I am writing in **strong support of HB 2997**, which will establish a designated grant fund within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to support college access and success programs for underserved students in Oregon.

I was raised in low-income housing in Portland. My parents—immigrants with less than a middle school education—couldn't help me navigate financial aid forms or college admissions. I was a first-generation student, overwhelmed, underprepared, and on the verge of slipping through the cracks.

TRIO changed everything. It gave me the mentorship, exposure, and tools I needed to succeed—not just academically, but emotionally. I went on to earn my Bachelor's degree from Portland State University and a Master's degree from Harvard.

In the decade since, I've trained over **100,000 students across more than 500 colleges and universities**, including dozens of TRIO programs right here in Oregon. I've seen firsthand how these programs equip first-gen, low-income students with the confidence and resources to not just survive college—but to lead in it.

Without sustainable funding, programs like TRIO will be forced to scale back or disappear altogether. And when that happens, it's not just programs that vanish—it's safety nets, mentors, lifelines, and futures.

I urge you to support HB 2997 to ensure Oregon continues to invest in students who need it most. The TRIO program didn't just help me find my voice—it made it possible for me to help others find theirs. That is the ripple effect of state-supported access and success programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tamam Waritu

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