

April 16th, 2025

Chairs [Lieber](#) and [Sanchez](#), Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg & Smith, and members of the committee,

My name is **Erik Ruch**, and I am the TRIO ETS program coordinator for TRIO Educational Talent Search program at Mt Hood Community College. I also serve on the Oregon TRIO Association Board as the representative for Congressional District 3. I write to you in strong support of HB 2997, which will establish a designated grant fund within HECC to support college access and success programs for underrepresented students in Oregon.

I have had the honor and privilege to work in TRIO for twelve years, supporting hundreds of future first-generation college students in East Multnomah County with their goals of postsecondary attainment and completion. I was a first-generation college student from a struggling family in Sandy, Oregon. When preparing for college, I had no guidance or support in developing workable goals to support going to college. It was no surprise when I dropped out within two terms. From there I worked in service industry jobs, but the dream remained. Finally in my mid-thirties, after paying off over \$35,000 in medical debt incurred from surgery without health insurance, I returned to college and obtained my bachelor's degree within four years. Because of this experience, I understood the struggle that so many underrepresented and first-generation college students face. If I had known about TRIO, I would have been better prepared for college.

This is why I work in TRIO and strive to support the students I serve. Students TRIO works with are talented, hard-working, and deserve support to achieve their goals of postsecondary completion. Students served by our program have gone on to attend Ivy League colleges, received scholarships, graduated college, completed Masters and Professional school degree programs, and contributed to improving the fortunes of their communities.

During my time working with the Oregon TRIO Association, I've served on the Last Mile Scholarship Committee, awarding scholarships to students on the verge of postsecondary completion that only need a little more support to make their dreams a reality. Students from our program have participated in study abroad programs coordinated by the OTA, allowing them to visit other countries and participate in rich, experiential-learning opportunities – changing their lives and expanding their knowledge of the world in the process.

Oregon TRIO programs have helped countless students navigate financial aid, succeed academically, and persist to graduation. Without sustainable funding, many

students will lose critical resources that support their college journey. This is why 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,

Erik R. Ruch

TRIO ETS Coordinator, MHCC

District 3 Representative, Oregon

TRIO Association Board