

To the Co-Chairs and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Laura Craska Cooper, and I am the Chair of the Central Oregon Community College (COCC) Board of Directors. I am writing today to urge you to fully fund Oregon's community colleges at \$920 million for the 2025-27 biennium.

As a board member, I see every day how vital our community college is to the students and businesses in our region. For many Oregonians, community colleges are the most affordable and accessible path to higher education, career training, and a better future. Whether students are preparing to transfer to a university or gaining technical skills for high-demand jobs, our colleges provide the education and support they need to succeed.

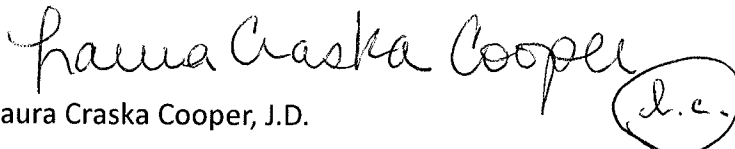
We are a critical piece of Oregon's workforce pipeline. COCC's programs in nursing, welding, early childhood education, and aviation, for example, directly address workforce shortages and provide students with the training necessary for family-wage careers. In fact, enrollment in career and technical education programs is growing rapidly across the state because students and employers alike recognize the value of these programs. But they are also some of the most expensive to offer. Without funding, we cannot adequately expand programs to meet demand, and Oregon will continue to face critical workforce shortages.

At the same time, our students face increasing challenges. The demand for childcare, food assistance, and housing support has grown dramatically, yet our colleges are struggling to keep up with the need. Without additional resources, we risk losing students—not because they aren't capable, but because they can't afford to stay enrolled.

Without sufficient state funding, community colleges will have no choice but to consider higher-than-ideal tuition increases or delayed growth of key programs. We want to keep tuition affordable, provide the support students need, and continue offering high-quality workforce training—but we need your help to do it.

I urge you to fully fund the Community College Support Fund at \$920 million. An investment in Oregon's community colleges is an investment in students, in businesses, and in the strength of our state's economy because community colleges WORK for Oregon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

  
Laura Craska Cooper, J.D.