



April 25, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, Vice-Chairs Girod and Gomberg, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for coming to Klamath Falls and listening to the needs of our people. My name is Kamal Gandhi, and I am an Associate Professor of Microbiology at Oregon Institute of Technology. I am also a member of our faculty union at Oregon Tech. But most importantly for today I am a member of the Klamath Falls community who strongly believes and therefore wishes to advocate for accessible (higher) education for all my neighbors across our great state.

For most of its existence, investing in education has been a cornerstone of our nation. The building of a school is what used to create a community. A family relocating often revolved around parents wanting a better school district for their kids. And so public education was an expectation of government expenditure.

I know firsthand the importance of a quality education. My family immigrated here 40 years ago specifically for the opportunities that we would be afforded. And my parents worked incredibly hard to make sure my brother and I could get the education they wanted for us, which was only possible because our public education system was affordable for low income families. This is no longer true in Oregon, as we have not prioritized education funding the way we once did.

Specifically for higher education, a report by the HECC earlier this year ranked Oregon 37th in public funding per student, with funding levels 24% below the national average. The students in my classes are primarily those from rural communities who are interested in health care, usually back in those same rural communities, a desperate need across our state. Investing in those students by funding higher education provides a return on that investment directly in those communities where it is needed.

I would therefore like to thank you for the good that has been done recently, while also urging you to do much more. First, that same HECC reported noted the gains Oregon has made in the last decade, and I want to thank you for that. Thank you for also increasing state funding outside of just the support funds. And thank you for restoring funds to the benefits navigator positions.

Beyond these gains, I would ask you to grow the Oregon Opportunity Grant funding. I would ask you to fund the Basic Needs Package. Most importantly, I would urge you to increase funding to the Public University Support Fund and the Community College Support Fund. Increasing the PUSF would help our universities maintain their quality without the continued increases to tuition (currently highest in the West for 4-year institutions). Please help us all Oregonians by investing in our education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Kamal M Gandhi, PhD
Associate Professor, Oregon Institute of Technology