

Testimony in Support of SB5525

April 29, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of increasing funding to the Public University Support Fund (PUSF) to an overall amount of \$1.275 billion. I am writing today as a concerned Oregon resident, parent and university professor at Western Oregon University who believes strongly in the value of accessible, affordable, and high-quality higher education for all Oregonians.

Oregon's investment in public higher education has fallen far behind that of our peer states. According to recent data, Oregon ranks near the bottom nationally in per-student funding for public universities. This chronic underinvestment has forced Oregon institutions such as Western Oregon University to raise tuition and reduce services, disproportionately affecting low- and middle-income students and families. In addition, lack of investment in higher education will cause us to fall further behind in reaching our State Education Goals
<https://www.oregon.gov/highered/strategy-research/pages/state-goals.aspx>

I have witnessed first-hand my students having to drop out of college because they can no longer afford the high tuition. Without a meaningful increase in the PUSF, more Oregonians will be priced out of the opportunity to earn a degree and contribute meaningfully to our economy and communities. The rising cost of tuition places an especially heavy burden on first-generation students, rural communities, and students of color—widening the very equity gaps we are working so hard to close.

Investing in higher education is one of the most powerful social and economic development strategies we have. A well-educated workforce attracts businesses, drives innovation, and increases state revenue through higher earnings and employment. Every dollar invested in public universities pays dividends in economic growth, civic engagement, and improved quality of life across our state.

I urge you to increase funding to the PUSF in the upcoming budget cycle. Doing so is not only an investment in our students—it is an investment in Oregon's future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mary Pettenger