



April 30, 2025

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

Re: SB 5525 - Support

Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz, and members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Sloan Oakrest. I am a PhD student in PSU's Department of Chemistry and the VP of Communications for the Graduate Employee Union at PSU.

There has been an organized swell of anti-intellectualism in American culture, which is only exacerbated by the skyrocketing financial barrier the vast majority of Americans have to take into consideration. This swell of people choosing to not pursue higher education serves to accelerate a devaluation in cutting-edge progress and health of the populace. The only people this outcome will benefit are people who are seeking to cultivate an easily controlled population for an authoritative society. As stewards of exploration of our physical, social and internal worlds, it is our responsibility to be sure (especially at this time in history) that we are maintaining access to necessary training for the next generation of leaders.

We are on the frontlines of the anti-intellectual battle and must send resources and life blood to the students in order to secure a prosperous future for all. Higher education has increasingly been viewed as classist, and superfluous, often even as a "scam" because dwindling state support has made higher education too expensive for the average person to access, and they are forced to find other means to survive in a job market that both requires advanced degrees and undervalues the labor of all workers. Personally, choosing whether to attend college or not as a young person took a lot of unpacking for me to reevaluate my own anti-intellectualism.

All jobs are important, but more often than not, jobs that require a higher education are the ones that develop new products and shape our future. Ultimately, this is why I chose to pursue an advanced degree despite the debt I have had to incur. However, if people

without means increasingly lose access to proper training and social mobility, all of us will suffer because the class divide will create an academically-enforced nepotism that will degrade our society's ability to progress with everyone in mind. We cannot replace the value that a diverse set of perspectives brings to the horizon line of history.

Undergraduate and graduate students need more state support financially, and in particular we need help with childcare, food, and housing assistance which have become increasingly scarce over the past five years. We need concrete support for struggling families and students, and we need the legislature to hear the voices of the people who know most intimately the blind spots of our society and how we can help them. We need highly educated workers to produce high quality futures. For this reason, I and my fellow members of the Graduate Employees Union call on you to invest \$1.275 billion in the Public University Support Fund, \$920 million in the Community College Support Fund, and \$450 million in the Oregon Opportunity Grant. Finally, we need \$22 million for the Basic Needs Package - House Bills 3182 and 3183 - which will provide essential support like housing and food assistance to help students stay enrolled and complete their degrees. Such investments will surely bolster the state economy, ensuring that highly educated workers can have more opportunities and space to spend money they earn.

We call upon the Legislature to invest in our communities and secure a future built by those who have the most connections to the grassroots of our society. This will improve everyone's quality of life, including those who do not need financial assistance.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sloan Oakrest

VP of Communications, Graduate Employee Union of PSU