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1:00 PM
Luke Nearhood
[Testimony on SB 5525](#)

Thank you Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz, and Members of the Subcommittee,

My name is Luke Nearhood, I am a 3rd year Physics PhD Student at Oregon State University and Vice President for Political Engagement of my union the Coalition of Graduate Employees (AFT local 6069) which represents ~1800 graduate teaching and research assistants at Oregon State. Graduate employees are both the present and future of Oregon's academic workforce. So, I will be speaking from the perspective of a student, researcher, teacher, and born-and-raised citizen of Oregon in favor of bringing the public university support fund to a total of \$1.275B.

I want to start by making one thing clear. Nothing is inevitable. Higher ed funding in Oregon is in the condition it is because the state and the people of Oregon have made a conscious choice for the past 35 odd years to systematically undervalue and underinvest in education. Though we have made progress in recent years, an additional investment of \$275M in university funding is a necessary next step.

Speaking from my personal experience in the OSU physics department.

Everyday I interact with faculty, staff, and my fellow graduate employees who are tired, and burnt out, because we can't afford to hire enough people to take on all the work we need to do. Every quarter there are classes that we just don't teach anymore because we don't have the funds to even replace the faculty who have retired.

In the short term, public university funding is necessary to ensure our state universities remain fully operational and ensure tuition increases are kept in check.

Every year, undergraduate students have to choose between their education, food, housing, and borrowing against their futures. And many of their instructors and TAs have to make the same choice. And that is not an environment conducive to true learning.

In the medium term, keeping our public universities operational is necessary to keep the communities in which they exist economically viable *and investing in our state education infrastructure helps us build resilience and independence in the face of an unpredictable national environment.*

In the long term, public education is necessary to the very future of Oregon.

We have a choice in what the future of our state looks like. And I hope you, and the people of this state, choose wisely.

Thank you.

Italics = cut from the live testimony for time