

Submitter: Brent Munoz

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5525

Testimony Before the Oregon Legislature – Funding for Community Colleges
By Brent Muñoz

Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Brent Muñoz, and I'm here to urge you to fully fund Oregon's community colleges, not just as institutions of education, but as engines of economic mobility, workforce transformation, and community resilience.

I speak not only as an administrator but as someone whose life was changed, twice, by community college.

I'm a first-generation college student. My family didn't have a roadmap for higher education, but my local community college gave me a place to start. It helped me launch a career before the Great Recession, and then, when the economy changed, it gave me the chance to retool and transition into the technology field. Those opportunities to adapt and grow, without going into massive debt, literally changed the trajectory of my life.

Community colleges are Oregon's most responsive and inclusive institutions of higher education. We serve students who are balancing jobs, families, and often profound financial hardship. We support veterans, new immigrants, adult learners, and first-gen students like me. And we do it with fewer dollars per student than any other public education sector.

But we are at a breaking point.

We are doing everything we can to keep up with the rapid pace of change in digital tools, software platforms, and the technology our students and local industries rely on. Our systems are stretched thin as we try to stay agile while being good stewards of public resources. And while we are constantly evolving, the support we receive hasn't kept pace with the complexity or speed of modern educational delivery.

I know some of you on this committee have direct experience with community colleges, whether as alumni, faculty, or board members. You've seen the magic that happens when students walk into our classrooms with uncertainty and walk out with confidence, skills, and options. You know we make a difference.

So, I ask you...fund that difference. Not just to sustain what we do, but to strengthen it. Help us modernize our systems so we can be proactive rather than reactive. Help us build flexible, transparent frameworks that allow us to make smart, dynamic choices about tools and services. And most importantly, help us keep the door open for the next first-generation student who just needs a chance. The current proposed budget of \$858 million should be a floor, not a ceiling. I urge the legislature to fund the community colleges, at the very least, at the \$920 million request in order to

maintain current service levels.

Oregon's community colleges are not a line item, they are a lifeline.

Thank you!