

Esteemed Legislators,

We are writing in support of the Public University Support Fund.

WOU, and the other TRUs, can't cut our way out of the budget issues we face as smaller schools. At WOU, we have trimmed and trimmed the classified staff and faculty ranks and that negatively impacts our ability to help our students succeed. Our students tend to be overwhelmingly Oregonian, non-traditional and first-generation. And we are pricing the promise of higher education out of the reach of the Oregonian students who would benefit most from that opportunity. And that hurts Oregon - and has negative economic consequences for the state.

WOU staff and faculty are critical in retaining and helping our students succeed, not only in their studies but in life. Students frequently credit their connection to classified staff and faculty as the reason they succeed. Classified staff and faculty directly support our students and, according to them, we are vital. Most of us do not make a lot of money and often work for less than our peers. But we didn't go into this work to become rich. We do still need to be able to afford groceries, pay the rent and support our families. When the PUSF is underfunded, the budget gets balanced on our already-bended backs, and through tuition increases that our students can't afford.

We need to have adequate funding to provide the education Oregon students need to be competitive and move our state forward. We need adequate funding to retain quality staff and faculty. Oregon currently funds higher education near the bottom of the nation. When I started at WOU, the state covered about 60% of the cost of an Oregon student's education. It is now less than 30% and, as a result, our average tuition rates are among the highest in the West. This is unsustainable and means fewer Oregon students can afford the education required for the most important growth and employment needs in our state.

Most of our graduates stay in Oregon and provide a much needed boost for local economies not only evenue but through the jobs they generate, the businesses they start, the services they provide. The faculty and staff employees who serve those students, along with those students, are major economic drivers in our rural and regional communities. Monmouth would be a very different town without a university situated in its midst.

We believe Oregon can do better. We believe we can make higher education affordable, and therefore accessible without driving down the wages and benefits of the classified staff and faculty who are so vital to our students' success.

As such, we urge you to:

- Invest \$450 million in the Oregon Opportunity Grant to expand financial aid for low- and moderate-income students,
- Invest \$1.275 billion in the Public University Support Fund to keep tuition manageable and preserve academic quality,

- Allocate \$22 million for the Basic Needs Package (House Bills 3182 and 3183) to provide essential support like food and housing assistance.

Together, these measures go a long way toward securing Oregon's future prosperity.

On behalf of the classified staff and faculty at WOU, we thank you for your time and consideration,

Melanie Landon-Hays	&	Jackson Stalley
WOUFT, AFT-Oregon 2278		WOU082, SEIU 503