

Submitter: Sloan Oakrest
On Behalf Of: GEU
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5525

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.

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. 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 which was a coping response to feeling financially cut out of shaping my own future within society. If I hadn't had the grants and scholarships I did, I wouldn't be sitting here today. This swell of people choosing to not pursue higher education accelerates 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 that we are maintaining access to necessary training for the next generation of leaders and explorers.

Undergraduate and graduate students need more state support with childcare, food, and housing assistance which have become increasingly scarce over the past five years. 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.

All jobs are important, and 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. Some people can't afford that choice. If people without means lose access to proper training and social mobility, 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.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sloan Oakrest
VP of Communications, Graduate Employee Union of PSU