

Submitter: Laura Nitti
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce Development
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3182

My name is Laura and I am the Benefits Navigator at Mt. Hood Community College. I am writing to ask for your support for the Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act, HB 3182 and HB 3183.

I'd like you to know a little bit about what my job is like and what I see happening to our students and in our communities. Every day, I meet with students who are working so hard to make ends meet while working on their education, whether learning English, completing a GED, completing a first college degree or certificate or returning to school to pursue a new career. I help students access critical supports like TriMet fare, referrals to housing programs, and public benefits. I also work next to the pantry and help students navigate internal college resources. My position enables the campus community to leverage existing community resources to support struggling students with their basic needs. This work has leveraged thousands of dollars in community resources including housing, healthcare, childcare, and transportation and has increased enrollment and retention. Without my role working to complete referrals or set up distribution processes, many of these resources would be inaccessible or unavailable entirely to students. I'm also able to advocate for systemic changes that can make those resources more accessible in the future and mitigate the discriminatory impacts of systemic problems. My role supports the success of local non-profits through partnerships and advocacy.

Unfortunately, I don't have the funding to make new resources available and most days feel like a struggle. Coming to my office is often a student's last resort. When nothing else has worked, students come back to me to check one more time if there's something else that can help them make rent, cover childcare or educational expenses. It is heartbreaking when all I have left to do is send them back to the same resources that they've already tried multiple times without success because our communities are spread so thin. Our students pursue their aspirations and confront hardship with compassion for each other, creativity and dignity every day. They deserve so much more from us than to be told to call 211info for the one hundredth time. Please support HB 3182, HB 3183 and continued funding of the Basic Needs Oregon Benefits Navigators.

Thank you for your continued attention to protecting the basic needs, otherwise known as human rights, of Oregonians and in this case Mt. Hood Community College Students.