

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

I have been a professor at Western Oregon University for 10 years, throughout this time I have served on the advisory board for Abby's House, which currently houses our basic needs program. I have seen our basic needs program grow as the needs of our student body have grown and grown more visible. Before this program was created and funded, I regularly had students miss class because they were experiencing houselessness, they were without food, or they just couldn't get to campus due to not having the money to pay for their transportation. When this happened before the basic needs program was implemented, there was not a place I could send students that would reliably be able to help them with the things they needed to be able to learn.

Funding for our basic needs program has made an enormous difference in our campus community. Students are able to access a variety of programs and services that keep them in college and keep them in class learning with their peers. If this program goes away on campus, I fear that many of our students will simply fall through the cracks. We know that many of our students experience food insecurity, and this will grow exponentially without access to the basic needs program and the ways this program connects students to benefits they are entitled to access but cannot navigate on their own. We know that rising rents will increase students experiences of houselessness. Without a benefits navigator, many of our students will not be able to access services available in Polk County. The list goes on and on.

While we know that all organizations want and need funds to continue their programming, this is vital for college students to continue to live with dignity. I urge you to maintain funding for this vital program.