



February 13, 2025

To: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce Development

From: Basic Needs Oregon

RE: Support for HB 3182 and HB 3183

Chair Hudson, Vice Chair Harbick and Fragala, and members of the committee,

My name is Zoe Cooper-Caroselli, I work at Portland Community College as the Statewide Program Coordinator for the Basic Needs Oregon college benefits navigator consortium. I am writing in support of HB 3182 and HB 3183: The Student Basic Needs and Workforce Stabilization Act, which will make important investments in student basic needs initiatives, affordable student housing initiatives, and textbook affordability.

Many Oregon college students struggle to afford food, housing, utilities, transportation, childcare, and textbooks, all while pursuing their education, learning, growing and working towards careers that will pay them a living wage. The Basic Needs Oregon benefits navigators work every day to support student success and college completion by connecting students to resources, building robust relationships with campus, community, and state/federal partners to create a stronger web of student supports, and changing the narrative around basic needs by raising awareness and reducing stigma on campuses.

Since the program's inception, the benefits navigators have served more than 39,000 students in need at colleges and universities across the state. Every day I hear stories from benefit navigators who are working with students who are homeless, or who haven't eaten yet that day, who are facing a basic needs barrier on their educational path and are seeking support. In addition to serving thousands of students each month across the state, the benefits navigators have initiated and expanded campus food pantries, brought partners to campus to sign students up for OHP and SNAP benefits, presented in classrooms and to faculty and staff to increase awareness. They have helped students navigate barriers to stay on their educational path and complete their goals. The impact is large.

However, the benefits navigators are not able to connect students to all the resources that they need - campus programs are limited, community resources, especially for housing, are very limited, and state/federal programs often fall short of

the full need. Benefits navigators need programmatic funding in order to address emergency student basic needs in the moment when other resources are not available, to keep students on their paths, so that they can meet their goals, and become the future of our state.

Currently, there is not sufficient funding for the operating budgets needed to sustain the programs or for personnel costs for Benefits Navigators. The investment asked for in HB 3182 will be used on a one-time emergency basis to strengthen Oregon college basic needs programs by:

- Funding basic needs personnel to ensure continued service levels and expanded program capacity to meet rising need
- Funding for direct student supports, such as providing emergency aid in the form of food, housing and transportation vouchers, childcare subsidies, emergency funds, etc.
- Funding for the creation of or improvements to campus basic needs infrastructure, such as food pantries, basic needs centers, ordering systems, refrigeration, safety upgrades, etc.

Oregon must invest in supports that address the biggest barriers to college access and success for underrepresented students. Funding for benefits navigators and basic needs programs is critical to addressing the increased basic needs insecurity we're seeing on campuses across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate the prior support from the legislature and look forward to being able to continue to offer and grow these important services to support student success.

Warm Regards,
Zoe Cooper-Caroselli
Statewide Program Coordinator
Basic Needs Oregon