



SB 263: Higher Education Tuition Equity

Letter of Support | February 25, 2019

To Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is Ella Meloy and I am a senior at Lincoln High School in Portland, Oregon. I am a member of [Oregon Student Voice \(OSV\)](#), a student-led organization that empowers students to be authentic partners with K-12 education decision makers. I am writing on behalf of OSV in support of Senate Bill 263. As an amendment to ORS 352.287, this bill provides an exemption from nonresident tuition fees at public universities in Oregon for refugees, special immigrant visa holders, and students who entered the United States legally through the Compact of Free Association Treaty from the Republic of Palau, the Republic of Marshall Islands or the Federated States of Micronesia. This bill is extremely important to provide equitable higher education opportunities for COFA Islander students, refugees, and special immigrant holders.

Throughout high school, the importance of a college education has been clearly communicated to me. I can see that it can be very difficult to be able to make a living wage to support yourself and your family without an undergraduate education or a vocational type of training after high school. As a United States citizen and native-Oregonian, I have the privilege of residency tuition at our public state schools in Oregon. This residency tuition, just less than \$15,000 a year at our public state schools, makes getting an undergraduate degree highly accessible to me. If the only option for me was a \$30,000 or \$40,000 a year non-resident tuition, I would be deterred from attending college, which would likely make it much harder for me to sustain myself and compete against college graduates for jobs in the future.

Residency tuition makes college accessible for many of my peers as well, but not everyone currently in my classes will have this access even though they are lawfully in Oregon and United States through a refugee or special immigrant status, or as a COFA islander. This bill would help change that and provide an equitable way for these students to attend college with their peers.

I, as well as the members of Oregon Student Voice, believe that SB 263 is the necessary step that Oregon must take to make attending college more equitable for all Oregonian students. Residency tuition will help refugee students, special immigrant visa holders and COFA islanders intending to become citizens or permanent residents have a more affordable route to college in Oregon. We hope that the Senate Committee on Education approves SB 263.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ella Meloy
Oregon Student Voice