

March 23rd, 2023

To: Texas Senate Higher Education Subcommittee

Re: Testimony Submitted FOR Senate Bill 2539

Honorable Chairman Creighton and Members of the Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education,

My name is Elias Ramirez, and I am honored to be able to speak with you today in support of Senate Bill 2539. I am a proud student at the College of the Mainland in Galveston County, where I will complete my Associate's degree in General Studies this Spring before attending the University of Houston-Clear Lake to obtain my Bachelor's degree in Public Service Leadership. As a member of the Texas Community College Student Advisory Council, I am excited to advocate for community colleges and students like myself.

As the current president of the Community Engagement Club at College of the Mainland, I have experienced first-hand the issues that impact community college students most. Financial burden is often a key issue; despite tuition costs that are lower than 4-year institutions, I still struggle to make ends meet given the full cost of attendance. Because my community college has about 5,000 students enrolled and limited support staff, I did not have adequate support navigating course selection. This coupled with my other financial obligations quickly became a huge challenge. As a low-income student who relies on financial aid, I found it difficult securing the money to cover textbooks and other materials needed for my classes. I am not alone; data shows that 16% of Texas community college students are facing homelessness, 42% facing food insecurity, and 55% facing housing insecurity. I know that many of my fellow Texans face the same dilemma of choosing which bills to pay in order to afford their education. With the implementation of SB 2539, otherwise educationally disadvantaged students will have access to improved financial opportunities, thus contributing to their overall academic success. Community college is an affordable, flexible option for students like me to take a step toward building a career that will sustain me and my family. However, this will not be possible without adequate support from community college staff, and such support requires financial investments.

I support SB 2539 because small community colleges like mine would be guaranteed a base tier of funding to ensure student retention, completion, and success. They would also be rewarded for their performance supporting students with greater needs: low-income, student parents, adult learners, foster youth, and other nontraditional students like me. While I am on track to complete my degree, there are so many other community college students in rural areas and small towns lacking the academic and wraparound services they need to secure their success. With the burden of some financial stress lifted, more students will be able to focus on their studies and career paths.

Thank you for your time and for giving me the opportunity to stand before you today to share why SB 2539 is important to me. I urge you to support Senate Bill 2539 and provide equal opportunities for all Texans to pursue their education, fulfill their potential, and benefit our economy.

Sincerely,

Elias Ramirez

Member, Texas Community College Student Advisory Council