

March 15, 2011

Dear Co-Chairs, Members of the Revenue Committee,

Thank you for taking time to hear this bill. My name is Stephanie Hinkle, and I am the founder of Trillium Charter School in Portland. As the Director of Trillium for more than 8 years, I have a deep understanding of the inequity issues surrounding charter schools in Oregon. I have been active in state-wide charter issues and have worked with many charters as they develop and grow.

Starting a school is a labor of love. Love for creating great communities, love for taking on challenges, sometimes love of chaos and birth, but most of all it is a love for students. It is the love of bringing passion and hope and self confidence and knowledge to developing humans. It is the love of providing healthy and strong adult relationships to children. It is the love of watching a young child full of inquisitiveness and naivety turn into a thoughtful, compassionate, capable, and knowledgeable member of the community. These are the reasons adults are in this work.

It does however, become disheartening to engage in this work while having the dawning understanding that this particular group of students (charter school students) must contend with less all of the time. In Oregon, where students are thought of as equal in importance, charter students are treated by the state as "less than" and not as important as public school students who attend district run schools. Every year when I would report the per pupil expenditures of the school and compare that with the district per pupil expenditures it would reinforce my awareness of state sanctioned bias. The difference was shocking.

One of the most often highlighted needs of my students that did not get met, that was met in district run schools was the need for counseling. I had students who were suicidal, who were victims or perpetrators of dating violence, who had substance abuse issues, who had mental health issues, who had no support at home, and the list goes on. Students from kindergarten through high school needed access to professional counseling support. Another area of support my students did not get, was college and career related counselors who were trained in the field. Advisors had to take on that role, among there many other roles. Students were at a disadvantage from the loss.

There are many other ways that charter students pay the price for their disadvantaged position. One big way is their environment. Charter schools must pay for their facilities from their operating budget. They cannot go out to the public to finance facilities. This situation leads to inadequate facilities, often with drastically lower square footage per student than their district run counter-parts. Many charter schools can't afford good play space either inside or out. This impacts their physical well-being.

Please stop this unequal and unfair playing field. It harms students and reduces our values of equality and fairness.