

Good afternoon Chair and members of the committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Donna DeForest, I am a retired Oregon teacher of 33 years. The last 30 years were spent in the Bethel School District in Eugene. I taught sixth graders all subjects over the years. My love for middle-schoolers started in the fall of 1979 at Cascade Middle School.

We were teaching to the whole child, giving them two full time counselors, middle school sports, and outdoor school. Our well- rounded education program included the basic subjects that we still teach, but we have lost the enrichment electives such as Foreign Languages, Art, Home Ec, Shop, Concert Band and Concert Choir and an AT-Risk Program for middle level students. Our class sizes were 21 to 24 students with 6 teachers to a team. Currently our 6th grade team is made up of 2 teachers. The loss of PE specialists and after school sports over the years has not been a healthy choice for our children. The 5 days a week activity class taught more than just physical fitness. It helped our students with the ability to get along with others and helped them focus on their studies during the day.

The 4 years of furlough days should be looked at as a loss of 2 months of their education. Our children will not get these losses back if we do not get adequate, stable funding. Those students who rely on two meals a day from the schools are left without their nutritional needs being met. Is this fair?

We know that we cannot just tax our way out of these problems. That's why we are willing to support fair and reasonable cost controls. I know teachers, including myself, are worried about losing retirement when we live on fixed incomes. But we also know there are problems with PERS, and many of us are willing to consider fair reforms. My peers care very much about the teachers still in the classroom.

We also know that we will have to have more funding, and that means new revenue to restore our school to what it once offered, and to give these kids a chance at a good education. When I look at what we are expecting of our current teachers, I think it is almost impossible. I invite you to go visit Cascade Middle School, or any similar low-income middle school anywhere in our state, and you will see that we aren't giving these kids a fighting chance, nor their teachers.

We will support you if you work for more revenue and tax reform. and I want to add, this year, it would be a great wrong to send back a kicker when there are 40 kids in a middle school classroom. Please don't allow that to happen. Take your time and listen to the new ideas before you close the book on this years' budget. It is better to wait longer and have the possibility to get more of what is needed to fund our childrens' education. Thank you.