



February 19, 2014

**Testimony Against SB 1538 before the
Oregon House Education Committee**
by Steve Buckstein

Chair Gelser and members of the Committee, my name is Steve Buckstein. I'm Senior Policy Analyst and founder of Cascade Policy Institute based in Portland.

I would like you to reject [SB 1538](#).

Interestingly, the Senate has overwhelmingly approved [SB 1525](#), which would make it easier for Oregon college students to take online courses from institutions outside the state. The chair of the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee noted how fascinating it was that the proposal would break down borders standing in the way of Oregonians having more higher education learning opportunities. That seems non-controversial and clearly a good thing.

Unfortunately, by a much closer margin, the Senate also approved SB 1538, which does the exact opposite of SB 1525. It actually builds up borders that will stand between Oregon's Kindergarten through 12th grade students and new [public charter school](#) options that might offer the very educational opportunities they want and need.

Several years ago I was watching a Portland Public Schools Board Meeting where several charter applicants were making their cases to the board.

One group wanted to start a school with, what I recall, was a particular arts curriculum. They'd jumped through all the hoops required of a charter applicant, but when the board members began commenting, it became clear that the applicant stood no chance of approval.

One board member looked at the applicants, and at the audience, and stated, "***We already have one of those.***"

She went on to explain that the district already had a school with a similar curriculum focus, and therefore they obviously didn't need any more. How she knew that there was no more demand among parents and students for such a focus was unclear.

They already had one of those, so that ended the discussion.

This bill would make it even easier for Portland and other districts to write off competent, innovative charter applicants by simply stating that their schools wouldn't advance one or more educational goals that the board had identified.

"*We already have one of those*" would become... "*We don't need even one of those.*"

This bill would stifle innovation, and stifle opportunities for students currently "captured" by their local public schools to find any way out...to find a better fit for their educational needs.

I hope you reject it.