

Michael Harris

Chair Gelser and members of the committee:

My name is Michael Harris. I come before you to register my concerns regarding SB 1538. As a school and district administrator in Oregon since 1980 I have witnessed a decline in the national rankings for Oregon from the top twenty to the lower forties.

One of the features of Oregon education used to be its belief in innovations and options for students. When school options gradually disappeared after the Measure 5, charter schools became the only vehicle for exploring alternatives for students.

In my estimation SB 1538 opens the door for increasing restrictions on options for students. Options manifest themselves in light of frustrations experienced by students, parents and educators. By establishing the arbitrary use of a requirement that a charter school would have to meet goals as set forth by a local school board has the potential to limit the creativity hoped for with charter schools. It also creates a clear avenue for politically driven agendas.

I understand the frustration that some school boards experience with charter school applications, but setting potentially arbitrary district goals create an opportunity for serious restrictions and even hidden agendas to stifle options for students.

I would like to suggest that a more measured option of creating a one-time commission on charter schools to establish a mechanism for applications that include requirements to site research and data. This would allow for innovations to justify their qualitative approach without the potential for politically driven decisions. This commission would be finished with its work once the framework is established. These measures would allow for a set of criteria with rubrics which would provide a substantial hurdle for applicants.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.