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Submitted to the Senate Education Committee
State Capital Building - Hearing Room D
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

**Testimony on SB 439 by Nancy Bales, Executive Director
The Gray Family Foundation**

Chair Roblan,
Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Gray Family Foundation grew out of the Gray Family Fund founded in 2007. Gray Family Foundation was established in 2012 as a supporting organization of The Oregon Community Foundation. Through our grant making, we seek to encourage and support the residents of Oregon in fostering a strong local land ethic, sustainable communities, and thoughtful stewardship of the natural environment. By providing philanthropic support for programs including Outdoor School education, camp maintenance, geography education, and teacher professional development, Gray Family Foundation seeks to give Oregon students a greater understanding of the world outside their classroom. We know that studying not just about but in the out-of-doors has a profound and lasting impact on a child's learning as a whole.

Since 2007, we have cumulatively granted over \$103 million to support this vision. Each year, we receive more than twice in requests than we are able to fund from schools and outdoor education providers for best practice programs, and these appeals account for only a small portion of the needs across the state. Studies, as well as antidotal evidence, cite lack of funding as the greatest barrier to participation in outdoor education programs.

Over our years of supporting this work, we have heard from schools, non-profits, residential camps, foundation partners, parents, and educators about the need to develop the structure and support in order to institutionalize this important program throughout the state. We know that many programs only exist because of one passionate teacher who is able to scrape

together community resources, which means the program is risk of ending when that teacher retires or leaves. We hear from schools about continual budget pressures leading to inequitable accessibility of Outdoor School across the state and even from year to year within a community. Moreover, we hear from camp facilities that are no longer hosting Outdoor School programs because these providers are not able to pay enough to cover the cost of wear-and-tear on their facility.

Our research tells us only about half the kids in our state have access to Outdoor School, and even fewer, access to what is considered a “best practice” full week experience of outdoor school education. And yet we also hear about the profound affect this outdoor experience can have on a child. It is sometimes the first time a student has access to three healthy meals and a warm bed or the first time they have been inspired in a learning environment. It teaches students to collaborate, provides them an appreciation of Oregon’s rich natural resources, and builds strong leaders.

We at the Gray Family Foundation see the need to keep people connected to and knowledgeable about what keeps our communities healthy which begins by supporting programs that help more of our children grow into community stewards. This happens by getting them outside and providing them an understanding of the natural systems and resources that sustain us. Outdoor School supports our youth in developing the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to understand the consequences of action (or inaction) and then to get educated, engaged and empowered to make decisions.

Gray Family Foundation is based on the values, beliefs, and lifework of John and Betty Gray, whose wide-ranging philanthropy and social contributions helped make Oregon the exceptional place it is today. Please join us in that vision by supporting Outdoor School for All Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Nancy E. Bales
Executive Director
Gray Family Foundation