



March 20, 2017

Testimony from Beven Byrnes, Principal of Bridges Middle School, to Oregon House Committee on Energy and Environment urging unanimous support of HB 2669 – The Community Toxins Reporting Act

My name is Beven Byrnes. I am the Principal and Executive Director of Bridges Middle School, a nonprofit school in Portland serving students with a variety of learning differences. I am also a resident in the same zip code of the school and a mother to four daughters. I have worked in Portland's nonprofit sector for over 20 years. **I am here today because I believe that all Oregonians have a right to know what toxins are being emitted by the businesses in their neighborhood.**

I recently learned just how urgently HB 2669, the Community Toxins Reporting Act, is needed when I learned about toxic hydrogen sulfide in the air of our neighborhood that our staff and students have been unknowingly exposed to since relocating to our North Portland building in 2013. Through a recent public meeting hosted by DEQ – *that we were invited to by members of our local neighborhood association* - we learned about two oil re-refineries in our neighborhood that have been allowed to continue operation years after a known lapse in DEQ permitting and discovery of the illegal removal of air toxin purifying systems at these sites.

EPA testing conducted at and around these sites in 2015 and 2016 verified four chemicals exceeded the chronic health benchmarks used by the EPA, including Hydrogen Sulfide, the culprit of the Big Stink in North Portland may have heard about. When inhaled, hydrogen sulfide is known to cause symptoms including persistent headaches and nosebleeds - symptoms frequently experienced by our students and staff.

Under current regulations, Oregon's environmental protection agency does not require nor collect detailed air and water pollution emissions data from business like these oil re-refineries. This creates a crippling disadvantage to the very government agencies that are charged with monitoring these polluters for the public. The Community Toxins Reporting Act fills this gap.

Bridges Middle School supports HB 2669 because it creates opportunities for government agencies and the people they are charged to protect - like our sensitive students and the dedicated staff members who serve them - to know what pollution is going into the air they breathe and water they drink. Communities and public officials need this data to understand and communicate the location and risk levels of toxic chemicals that damage human health and the environment. Schools need this information to inform families as soon as a potential health risk is identified. HB 2669 provides this opportunity, and it does so without any additional state funding. The reporting expenses are appropriately paid for by the polluters, not tax-payers.

On behalf of our students, their families and our staff, I urge you pass this bill out of Committee with a strong recommendation for adoption. *Our children deserve better. Oregon can do better. This bill gives Oregon's authorities the data needed to do better.*

I thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you all agree that our children are worthy of your unanimous support.

Beven Byrnes



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Bridges Middle School is an independent nonprofit school in Portland, Oregon where caring, trust, respect and excellent teaching take 5th-8th grade students with learning differences to new levels of confidence, competence and opportunity.
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