

TO: Senate Education Committee

From: Kieran Connolly, Executive Director, Trillium Public Charter School

RE: Senate Bill 915

Chairman Roblan and members of the committee:

My name is Kieran Connolly, I am the Executive Director of Trillium Public Charter School in Portland.

Today I would like to paint a picture for you about what the passing of Senate Bill 915 would mean for our students or, perhaps more accurately, what not passing it might mean for our students.

You have heard from many people today about the value of charter schools to students, families and communities in Oregon. You have heard from Michael and Tajiri about how students thrive at Trillium in particular.

At Trillium, we take the edict for charter schools to be both innovative and work with students on the margins of public education very seriously. We do this through fostering education based on critical thinking and community engagement, and by using innovative approaches in Restorative Justice and Project-Based Learning.

Oregon has had a charter school law in place since 1999. Let's be frank. Advocates and legislators have tried for years, with varying levels of success, to fix the inequities that plague the students who choose to attend charter schools. Watching all of the progressive laws that come out of this legislature it baffles me to see the lack of attention to the resource inequities students in our charter schools face.

Out of the 80% ADMw we receive for our K-8 students we have to pay a mortgage that costs us more than \$250,000, or 10% of our budget, a burden neighborhood schools do not face. We pay into PERS at a rate of 22% of our employee salaries, 18% more than our sponsoring district, which is another 10% of our budget. We are charged 100% of cost for any buses we use for field trips, 70% more than our sponsoring district. Despite these costs, we still find a way to spend 72% of our budget on our staff.

In the 15 years that we have existed as a school it has been a constant struggle just to stay open. We haven't had the money to fix our HVAC system, so our 5 year olds eat lunch in winter coats most of the year. We can't afford new computers, so our students do their state testing on refurbished hand-me-downs that frequently crash and make them have to start the test over again. Our playground is a parking lot.

Our teachers, who we know are the most impactful part of a student's learning experience and are what make our school functional, develop deep and meaningful relationships with our students. Our teachers work incredibly hard to build safe spaces for them so that they can learn. However, they only stay an average of three years before they need to move on to district jobs that pay \$15,000 a year more for the same experience so that they can afford to live in our city.

Our kids do not deserve this. Many of our students are like Tajiri, and not just the high school students. Our first, third and fifth graders are students that have struggled and not found success at their neighborhood schools. They are at risk of disappearing from our public system entirely, there is no catchment system for these kids. There are almost no options for K-8 students that struggle in their neighborhood schools, students who often act out behaviorally due to trauma. These are our kids.

Yet, every year we have to consider whether or not we can afford to stay open. I will go back today, regardless of your decision, and do everything I can to serve our kids. Kids that our state and education system often want to believe do not exist.

But the amount of time that we can continue do that is finite. If things do not change, we will close our doors, and these kids will have nowhere to go.

You have the power to change that today. The disparity our students experience is profound. This does not require new funds allocated from you, it does not mean that funds disappear from neighborhood schools.

We are not asking for more than other schools, we are not even asking for the same. We are asking for enough to not close. That means 95% ADMw.

Oregon needs schools like Trillium, we do not turn kids away, we have one of the lowest exclusionary discipline rates and one of the lowest dropout rates in the state. We serve the kids that no one else can.

You have the power today to ensure that our students have what they need to be successful and flourish in a safe environment, a decision to the counter of that could be one that leaves our most needy students out in the cold.

Not giving our schools enough money to survive is no different than forcing us to close our doors. Please acknowledge that these kids exist and that they need schools that can serve them.