

**Date:** 4/11/2017  
**To:** Chair Roblan and Education Committee Members  
**From:** John Nelsen, Executive Director, KNOVA Learning Public Charter School  
**Re:** Testimony on SB 915

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of SB915.

My name is John Nelsen. I am a lifelong Oregonian and a career advocate for equity in public education. I have four children and two grandchildren. I served three terms on my local school board spending most of that time in leadership. For the past 20 years, I have been an strong advocate for school choice generally, and more specifically, Oregon's charter school community.

I am currently the Executive Director of KNOVA Learning Public Charter School. KNOVA is a majority low-income and majority racial minority school serving 400 students in East Multnomah County's Rockwood Community. Like most children, KNOVA students come to school excited to learn new things, gain new skills and build big dreams for their future. Unlike most Oregon children, KNOVA students live in a community deeply scarred by poverty, violence and substance abuse.

Still, even when facing high levels of poverty, joblessness, domestic violence, abuse, and exposure to drugs and alcohol, KNOVA families make the pro-active choice to send their child to our charter school rather than traditional schools in our neighborhood. Today I speak for those children and their families.

Today I ask: What about the children? Is little Miguel at my school really only worth 80% of what his next-door neighbor Billy is worth at the traditional public school a few blocks away? (Less than 60% if counting "all funds")

Today I ask: Shouldn't little Tasha have the same level of resources made available for her education as her counterpart enjoys at a traditional Reynolds School District school?

Today I ask: What are the morally or ethically defendable argument that makes the current inequity okay or anything less than institutionalized protectionism?

Here is the truth: Some twenty years ago, when Oregon's charter school law was being written, lobbyists representing OEA, COSA and OSBA (the same special interests that are in this room today) were successful in lobbying for charter school funding (and sponsorship) provisions that protected the traditional schools and made establishing a charter school nearly impossible, or better yet, discouraged those who might try to start a school from doing so in the first place.

Still they rise. Last year there were 126 charter schools in Oregon. Each charter school is unique in the delivery model and the community served. Sadly, all Oregon public charter schools have one unacceptable common reality: Students in Oregon public charter schools are seen by law as worthy of less funding support than students in the orthodox system.

SB 915 is a chance. It is a chance to fix an inequity that was cooked into the law many years ago.

It is a chance for the legislature to demonstrate to the people that Oregon values all of its children equally.

In short, It is a chance to do the right thing for our children's. Please do the right thing by actively & openly supporting SB 915

Thank you for your time.

John W. Nelsen, Executive Director

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