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June 14, 2017

Members of the Oregon State House of Representatives
State Capitol
Salem, Oregon

Dear Ladies & Gentlemen:

I wish to express my strong support for SB 123, the bill to allow Oregonians to petition voters to approve ballot measures that, when passed, would create Special Children's Districts throughout the state. The Special Districts would be able to raise locally sourced funds to support out-of-school-time programs that support student success. It would allow communities to choose to directly fund the programs their children need.

I am a business owner, resident of Washington County, parent, grandparent, past member of the Washington County Commission on Children & Families, and co-founder and member of the Washington County Kids Initiative Steering Committee. As a result, I am acutely aware of the inequities that many of our children experience. These inequities serve as barriers to their academic success. Early childhood, after school, mentoring, summer, and nutrition programs make a difference in ameliorating those barriers. Unfortunately, neither the state nor our counties currently invest the amount of money needed to adequately fund these vital programs.

Washington County, like most counties in Oregon, is home to both "haves and have-nots" as a result of significant economic disparities, particularly for people of color and other marginalized groups who are often left out. The county has gaps in its services to its children. Much work needs to be done statewide to ensure every child gets a good start in life and graduates from high school. With appropriate infrastructure, expanded and improved out-of-school time programs Oregon's children can thrive. And achieve academic success.

SB 123 is budget neutral. Before a district could be formed, signatures would have to be collected to allow a special district measure to be placed on a ballot. The measure would then need to be passed by registered voters. District boundaries could be proposed at the same time. Local boards would then have to be elected and then ballot measures passed to raise revenue.

I believe passage of SB 123 is important because cities and counties have their own priorities--usually not involving children--often involving development and roads. Elected officials are often cautious about putting anything more on the ballot that will make their priorities less likely to get passed. Special Children's Districts will allow communities to raise locally sourced funds for these programs independently. Further, at the state level, it makes no sense for programs that support school success to have to compete with the schools for precious state resources.

Sincerely,

Susan Bender Phelps