

PAUL L. EVANS
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 20, 2017

Representative Doherty, Chair
House Committee on Education
Oregon House of Representatives
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Chair Doherty,

I am writing this letter in support of House Bill 2691. Despite the number of pages involved in explaining its purpose, the bill really is a simple one: if passed it would require demonstrated civics proficiency, of some kind, as a requirement for the award of a high school diploma.

This bill has three advantages: 1) it provides a tool for encouraging greater civics education and learning opportunities; 2) it allows for maximum flexibility for school districts to determine a proficiency standard best suited for the circumstances of their community; and 3) it can be implemented without any additional state funds for implementation.

Truth be told, this is less of a solution – a legislative approach – than I wish. In a perfect world, we could adopt a robust, strategic investment in civics education for students in all grades of study within our public educational enterprise. But we do not live in a perfect world; we live in a time when we must find creative methods to encourage measured progress. This bill meets that standard.

It addresses a well-known, identified problem facing our democracy: the growing schism between groups of citizens who have wildly varying levels of civics awareness, knowledge, and skills. For all the best intentions, we have prioritized other academic disciplines too often at the expense of civics. This was not purposeful, but it has consequence. Sadly, our politics has become far more destructive, nasty, and counter-productive in recent times. While there has always been, and always will be, differences of opinion over government, our history is a story of people finding common cause to solve problems. This narrative is now at risk.

I believe the lack of civics education as a priority is a driver for many of the failures of our political structures and systems. I believe people who better understand the forms and functions of government make better – more sustainable – choices. And I believe whatever our personal ideology, we are all more effective citizens, when we understand the basics of how we pay for the services we seek, what the government can and cannot do, and who is charged with specific responsibilities.

Thank you for your willingness to schedule a public hearing on House Bill 2691. Please let me know if there is anything I can provide that might help advancing this proposal.

Respectfully,

Paul L. Evans
District 20