



February 17, 2017

Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court Street  
Salem, WA  
97301

**RE: OEA Support for Employment Relations Board (ERB) Funding HB 5008**

Dear Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Education Association, I am writing to express our support for the Employment Relations Board (ERB) and the attendant funding necessary to support the ERB in HB 5008.

The ERB is the primary facilitator of labor-management peace in Oregon's places of public employment. Oregon's many public employers and tens of thousands of Oregon's public employees benefit from the ERB's efforts. In many ways, it is the oil that lubricates the engine of Oregon's economy.

The ERB is a trusted third party that does not only effectively resolve and prevent workplace disputes, but it also gives parties the tools to create a cooperative, constructive relationship.

Reducing ERB funding would have a negative political and economic impact in this state that would be hard to measure - yet easily seen - in strikes, litigation, and reduced productivity.

ERB is especially effective in helping public unions avoid strikes. State law requires that parties engage in a least two mediation sessions prior to a declaration of impasse, an event that often triggers a strike. Most contract mediations result in resolution before impasse, and any reduction in ERB funding will increase the likelihood of strikes. This consideration is especially acute for the 2017-19 biennium because over half of 200+ OEA collective bargaining agreements will be negotiated in the spring of 2017, with an additional 25% bargained in 2018.

While mediation often produces collective bargaining agreements within two to three sessions, it also helps to minimize the length and acrimony of strikes. For example, when the Medford

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Education Association went out on strike in 2014, ERB mediators kept the parties engaged at the bargaining table during the strike, which would have undoubtedly gone on longer without the

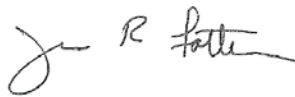
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mediators' involvement. Any reduction in ERB funding could lead to the loss of an essential "safety valve."

ERB also offers facilitation training and services for bargaining partners who want to engage in non-traditional bargaining, which focuses more on collaborative problem solving than on reaching compromise. For those bargaining teams with the capacity and commitment to attempt this type of bargaining, ERB's facilitation and training has proven to be valuable, especially since private facilitation and training is too costly for many school districts and associations. Reduction in ERB funding will impede a trend toward collaborative bargaining.

In closing, we strongly urge the Committee to retain funding for the ERB. Its importance is paramount.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim R. Fotter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a distinct "R".

Jim Fotter  
Executive Director  
Oregon Education Association