



Testimony – HB 4117

Chair Barnhart and Members of the committee:

My name is Courtney Westling and I am the Director of Government Relations for Portland Public Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about HB 4117.

Portland voters have supported local option levies since they became allowable in 1999. Last renewed in 2014, local option funds have been a critical supplement to PPS in an inadequate state funding environment. In FY 2016-17, for example, PPS raised \$86.9 million, supporting approximately 827 teaching positions.

Since 2015, however, PPS has unintentionally raised more local option revenue than allowable under state statute due to unanticipated growth in the Portland real estate market as well as a statutory change which redirected local option revenue from urban renewal agencies to school districts for the first time. PPS was not notified of this situation until this past fall. Thus, over the past three years, these funds were budgeted and spent, allowing the District to retain hundreds of teaching positions, make steady improvements in our graduation rate, and begin to build back the educational qualities that our children deserve, but had been decimated during the recession. Clearly, the current statutory limits, last updated 15 years ago, have not kept pace with the region's growing economy, restraining school districts from maximizing what local voters intended when they approved local option levies.

House Bill 4117 would do two things: it would exempt school districts from repaying local option revenue beyond current limits and update decades-old limits to allow school districts with local option levies to keep voter-approved levy dollars in district, as intended. Should this bill not be approved, PPS will have to include this repayment in our current budget, reducing funding for the very teachers our local option has helped to fund.

Thank you.

Courtney Westling
Director of Government Relations
Portland Public Schools