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○ SED Exhibits

Testimony from an elementary school teacher in the David Douglas School District in support of HB 4113

Good afternoon- For tomorrow's hearing on HB 4113, please find testimony in support from a first grade teacher in the David Douglas School District who wishes to remain anonymous in order to protect the privacy of some of her students:

I am a first grade teacher at a public school in Portland, Oregon. I have been teaching for 14 years. My class of 26 students is full of curious, smart, and kind children. Eleven languages are spoken in my classroom and every student qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Some of my students have experienced tragedy and sadness that many people don't know exist outside of movies. They have lost family members, had their homes destroyed because of war, been exposed to rape and murder and had to flee their countries. Many of my other students, who are not refugees, also endure trauma. Their families struggle to find shelter, buy food, and provide the stable daily life that a child needs to thrive.

As a school, we have been participating in professional development around trauma informed practices. Trauma affects the brain and makes it very difficult for children to learn and retain new information. We have learned that a person who experiences trauma has a brain that is wired differently. The "fight or flight" system is hyperactive. What does this mean for my classroom? This means that I have students who have 90-minute tantrums when the day doesn't go as they expected. With limited resources, our best option is to leave the classroom while those students tantrum. That's 90 minutes that 25 other students miss out on consistent instruction. I have students who need warnings about fire drills and require noise-cancelling headphones because loud sounds trigger a fight or flight response. I have students who need to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner at school, because there is no food in their refrigerators. I have students who need constant affirmation because the only kind words they hear are at school. Four of my students are on different behavior plans; each of them working to earn rewards, 20 minutes at a time. I have a cabinet filled with snacks, socks, and coats. I have students whose basic needs are met at school instead of home. I have a box of sensory items/fidgets to help kids who are overwhelmed or who can't sit still. As their teacher, I act as a counselor, mother, nurse, and social worker. It's a really big job and it's gotten more difficult these past 14 years.

I love my students and I choose to work at my school. I acknowledge that I can go teach at a school less than a mile away and it would be exponentially easier. I am writing because things are getting worse. Teaching is getting harder. There are so many students who have so many needs, that at times it feels impossible. My students deserve and need more of my attention. There are too many kids in my class. We cannot control the home environment or history of our students, but perhaps with smaller class sizes, we could afford to give them the attention they deserve.

Thank you for your commitment to reducing class sizes.