



To: Senate Education Committee

From: John Larson, President, Oregon Education Association

RE: Support for HB 4113

Chair Roblan, members of the committee, my name is John Larson, and I'm an English teacher from Hermiston. I currently serve as President of the Oregon Education Association, representing more than 45,000 professional educators who serve roughly 600,000 students across Oregon.

I have been an educator for ____ years. We have heard time and again that our education system is broken, but the legislature continues to fail to deliver solutions to fix it. We know large class sizes are one of the biggest problems facing our education system. Almost 20% of Oregon Kindergarten classes have more than twenty-six students. Over 400 math classes have upwards of thirty-six students.

Those who oppose this bill are quick to identify problems, but even quicker to dismiss solutions. They believe that somehow, if we simply ignore the problem, magically it will all be solved. If we are ever going to truly address the obstacles facing our students, we must be willing to talk about class size.

I am sick and tired of professional educators not being included in decisions that impact our students and our classes. Large class sizes have dramatic impacts on the ability of educators to provide students the individualized attention they need to succeed in school. You've heard from school board members, educators, and community members in support of this bill. Today, you will hear from more educators about what exactly large class sizes mean on the ground, for students struggling to learn and for educators doing everything they can to ensure every one of their students has what they need.

Their experiences vary. The House Education Committee heard from a middle school teacher in the North Clackamas school district, Rose Janusz (JANICE) who has a total 256 students she tries to reach each day. Ms. Janusz (JANICE) carries pain and guilt each day, wondering if she might have made a difference in the life of one of her students who committed suicide. She asks whether smaller class sizes would have meant a better ability to reach that student, whether she could have recognized the warning signs and been able to intervene in some meaningful way. She asks how she

will be able to reach every student in her classes going forward when each of them gets an average of approximately 2 minutes of her time each day.

You have written testimony on the record from a first grade teacher in the David Douglas School District. In her first grade class - 6 and 7 year olds - there are eleven different languages spoken and every single student qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Every single student in her class. Many of these students have experienced unimaginable trauma in their lives, coming from war torn countries where they have lost family members and seen homes destroyed. Twenty-six students with these experiences, all in one class. Her students need – and deserve – more of their teacher's time than her class size allows.

We are here today asking for the legislature to do something to help educators serve Oregon students. We've asked many times before, and we will keep asking. Over and over again we've told you we need more tools to do our work. Over and over again the legislature has come up empty handed.

HB 4113 obviously will not solve all of our schools' problems. Only proper resources and full, holistic support of our schools will do that.

What HB 4113 does do is throw educators a lifeline. It says that you value educators and the expertise they bring. It says that the vantage point that they have from the front lines of our schools is worth something. It gives them a voice at the bargaining table to work collaboratively with their districts to do their best to manage class size.

Other states have already done this. Washington and California both negotiate class size. And later this afternoon you will hear from the bargaining chair from Portland who will describe how a local bargaining unit and a superintendent from California were able to work together to devise an approach to managing class size that works for students in Portland. A handful of districts out of more than 200 do have conversations about class size. We believe these conversations ought to take place in every corner of the state, to find solutions that fit each community.

That's what this is about. It's about giving educators in each local community some tools to manage class size that fit within their community's needs and within the district's means. That we are here today a day after the deadline to move bills, is, to me, a travesty. This is something the legislature ought to have done years ago. We were proud to watch the Oregon House step up to pass HB 4113 with a strong, bipartisan vote. This is a real missed opportunity for the Oregon Senate. My ask to you today is that you, Senator Roblan, will ensure that this topic is a major feature of the conversations in the Joint Committee on Student Success. And then, that you come back in 2019 and pass this bill in the Oregon Senate, send it back to the House for them to pass it again, and give every educator in every district input decisions about class sizes in their districts so that we can stop students from falling between the cracks. Every student in Oregon deserves to have the individual attention they need in order to thrive in school.

Thank you.