

**Testimony to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on General Government
Hearing on SB5502**

February 6, 2019

**Karoli Cadarette
Ashland, Oregon**

I urge this committee to vote **for** the full funding proposed in the Governor’s Budget, SB 5502 for Classroom Law Project.

Introduction

As a teacher at Ashland Middle School, and a citizen of Oregon, I have experienced first-hand the difficulty in finding resources, professional development, and classroom strategy support for my social studies classes. But I have been able to overcome those challenges because of the support I receive from Classroom Law Project (CLP). I would like to share with you how this small, non-profit organization has changed the way I am able to actively engage my students in civics and democracy, and why I believe it is in the Legislature’s, Oregon’s, and this country’s best interest to support the expansion of CLP’s work to more effectively reach across all regions of the state.

My Story

As a middle school teacher, I’m in the unique and privileged position of getting to be the first person to introduce our youth to civics and the process of democracy in our country. This is a huge responsibility as the future of our democracy depends on having an engaged and educated population. Which is why I, and all educators, spend so much time trying to find, or develop, civic lessons that draw our students into participating in the democratic process. Eleven years ago after attending my first CLP workshop, which focused on the upcoming elections, I realized I had found the rich, content based, resources and support I had been searching for.

One of the most valuable and unique aspects of CLP is their all-encompassing approach to professional development. CLP takes the time and finds the experts to thoroughly educate the teachers on the content knowledge first. Then we are given comprehensive curriculum which includes various learning modalities, levels of scaffolding, and diverse perspectives. And finally, one of the most important activities (and unfortunately one rarely afforded to educators) is the opportunity to collaborate as professionals. With the guidance of CLP we work through the lessons as a class of students would and share our experiences in order to be fully prepared for teaching and provide the best civics education possible for our country’s future leaders.

One amazing experience my students have is the opportunity to participate in a mock legislative hearing. This is a culminating activity at the end of our 5-week election unit, taught using all CLP curriculum, which the students find engaging and interesting. Every student testifies as an “expert”, on

a topic of their choice, at our city council chambers, to a legislature made up of city council, school board, and community leaders. They are asked questions by the legislators and have to defend their position. One of my favorite comments that I get from the students after they've testified is "Ms. Caddy, I didn't know that adults really do care about what we have to say on these issues." This empowerment has led them to write letters to elected officials and have their editorials published in the local paper. They've invited the Mayor of Ashland, Jackson County Commissioners, and even President Trump to come speak to them about current issues, we're still waiting to hear back on that one, and they have asked their parents to take them to local protests, such as the Jordan Cove project. What I hope you are hearing is the "doing" which is the power of Classroom Law Project's curriculum and on-going support of educators. It creates such an authentic experience for the students that they feel the excitement of participating in a democracy and it has encouraged them to become active citizens in their community.

Why your vote for this funding matters

Civic Education is not just a hot topic in the news cycle. It is a very real part of why the United States established universal public education in the first place. That we train our children up to understand not only how our democracy works, but to participate in it, is what perpetuates that very democracy. But because of the focus on literacy and math testing, funding for civics and social studies has been limited, in turn limiting the opportunities for our students to learn the civic skills and knowledge that are so vital to their futures. Most Oregon districts cannot afford to provide civics educators with quality professional development, mentoring, resources, or materials, so hundreds of civics teachers in Oregon fend for themselves.

However, those very gaps are the ones that Classroom Law Project is dedicated to filling. Despite its small size, the reach and impact of Classroom Law Project is mighty. This non-profit organization has a staff of dedicated educators and experts in civics and law-related education who make it their mission to provide those missing pieces of support to civics and social studies teachers like me. They travel six hours from Portland to Ashland to participate in my classroom hearings and encourage my students as they practice their knowledge and understanding of the constitution. They make it possible for me to attend the annual Civics Conference in Salem because my substitute and travel is covered. They bring new and interesting professional development to Southern Oregon as often as they can. However, because of their limited resources, they typically only get down to Southern Oregon two or three times a year.

With funding from the Legislature, CLP would be able to establish a full-time presence in Southern Oregon, build up the community and network of civics educators, and provide the support we all need for our practice and for our students. CLP would be able to initiate some of its wonderful programs that currently only operate in the Portland Metro area including Court Tours, the Law Day Student Conference, more frequent professional development workshops, and regular in-classroom support for teachers – as well as the strong, consistent support necessary to develop Mock Trial and We the People constitution teams in more regions of the state, bringing more students the experience of engaging in our democratic processes, along with the tremendous personal growth and relationships that come from that. The gaps in civics support and opportunities for students that we currently struggle with would be creatively and expertly filled by Classroom Law Project.

I believe that with their presence in regions throughout Oregon, we will start to see a revived spirit of civic participation throughout the state as parents and community members witness their students experiencing the active practice of democracy in fun and creative ways.

Conclusion

I thank you for the opportunity to share my story and the importance I believe that Classroom Law Project plays for civic education in Oregon. I strongly urge you to vote for the full funding of CLP in SB5502 and guarantee that the results will benefit all Oregonians, especially educators and students. After all, these are the Oregonians that will usher in our future, and that future will be brighter with stronger civic education.