

April 24, 2019

Oregon House Human Services and Housing Committee
On behalf of Senate Bill 543

Dear Chair Ken-Guyer, Vice Chairs Noble and Sanchez, Representatives Helt, Meek, Mitchell, Schouten, Williams, and Zika,

Thank you for considering my words in support of Senate Bill 543 which would allow for the creation of children's services districts and the development of out of school programs for children in Oregon.

As director of Washington County Juvenile Department, I had the privilege of performing public service in Oregon for eighteen years until my retirement in 2009. A highlight of those years was the opportunity to forge a network of juvenile crime prevention initiatives in partnership with schools, law enforcement, and community agencies. These programs grew out of clear research findings on what actually works in engaging young people, preventing crime, and creating pathways to successful lives. Graduating from high school always comes to the top as a critical element. Closely related is access to out of school programs - early childhood, after school, and summer programs. Those activities accomplish a range of goals - contact with positive peers, relationships with mature adult role models, learning of new skills, constructive use of time. The societal outcomes are well documented - reduced crime, higher graduation rates, and sound preparation for jobs, among other benefits.

In Washington County and other parts of Oregon, after school and summer programs became integral to juvenile crime prevention strategies. Although they focused on a limited population of high risk youth, the results were dramatic. Access to similar programs for a broader range of children holds even greater promise. Benefits of the programs reach beyond the children who participate to parents, families, and the larger community.

Families with financial means can find ways to access opportunities. The gap is glaring, however, for children and families who are economically disadvantaged. They face numerous barriers, such as costs, fees, and transportation. Our collective responsibility is to pay attention to those in need and to build the whole community. Access to these programs is not a frill but a necessity. It is an investment in the education and health and well being of our children and youth and in the future quality of life in our communities.

Senate Bill 543 does not call for direct involvement of state funds, but rather provides a framework for local communities to develop and expand access to critical services.

Sincerely,

Joseph Christy
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