



Testimony supporting HB 2001

June 11, 2019

Joint Committee on Ways & Means
Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
Oregon State Legislature

Chairs Manning and Gomberg and Members of the committee:

For the record, I'm Courtney Westling, Director of Government Relations for Portland Public Schools. I am here today in support of HB 2001 to allow for more housing options near schools in residential neighborhoods.

There's no question that our entire region faces a housing affordability crisis. And a critical solution to that crisis is to build more housing. But where that housing is located is just as important as how much housing is available. We need more housing options within walking distance to our schools.

Today, the neighborhoods surrounding most of the schools in our district are zoned almost exclusively for single-family homes. This exclusive zoning impacts which neighborhood school a family can afford to attend.

It's important to remember that families of the children in our district don't only live in single-family homes. They live in apartment buildings, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and ancillary dwelling units (ADUs). And too many of our students – over 1,000 last year – are struggling without a stable housing situation. We're not the only district dealing with these challenges: Last year, Beaverton had nearly 1,800 homeless students and Medford had 1,100.

We talk a lot about the value of neighborhood schools, but one fact that is often left out of the conversation is that the student populations of our neighborhood schools are a direct reflection of the housing options available in the surrounding neighborhoods. As a result, access to those schools is limited by families' ability to afford a home.

Exclusionary zoning leads to economic segregation of schools – and – as a result, racial segregation. Why is the student population of one PPS school 14% white while another three miles away is 79% white? One reason is exclusionary single-family zoning.

Right now, single-family homes are the only housing option in most neighborhoods in Portland – and they are priced to be out of reach for most families. Duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and ADUs can provide options that are more affordable than what is available in most Portland neighborhoods.

By preserving the single-family nature of these neighborhoods, we are essentially walling off access to our schools for a large portion of our student population – especially those from underrepresented communities.

There is ample research to show that student outcomes improve when schools are more balanced by race/ethnicity and income. Any measures that support desegregation of housing will work hand in hand with the Student Success Act that the Legislature recently approved.

If HB 2001 passes, it will also amplify the positive benefits of Safe Routes to Schools, our effort to encourage families to walk and roll to school through education, community events, and street safety improvements. The locations of our schools aren't changing, but we can update the zoning rules to allow for more students to live within walking distance. When kids walk or bike to school, they get more physical activity, classroom performance improves, and families save on transportation costs.

This policy isn't the singular solution to housing affordability. But it is an important step that will help provide economic opportunity for the students and families of Portland Public Schools for decades to come.