

Dear Co-Chair Courtney, Co-Chair Kotek, and members of the Joint Interim Committee on the Third Special Session,

This is Paul Hillyer, the superintendent of the Klamath Falls City Schools. I am here to urge you to grant COVID liability immunity for Oregon K-12 schools. As you know, Oregon schools' liability insurance company, PACE, like other insurance companies across the nation, refuses to cover school districts for COVID-related liability claims. At least twelve other states' legislatures have stepped up as we are asking you to do and have granted liability immunity to school districts for COVID-related lawsuits.

It is extremely important for the Oregon legislature to do the same as even one COVID-related lawsuit and damage award could literally cripple a school district's budget and, as a consequence, educational opportunity for its students for many years. District budgets already are strained due to COVID health and safety expenses and a drop in enrollment due to a large uptick in parents choosing homeschooling for their children. A COVID-related lawsuit would stretch a district beyond what its already challenged budget can handle. Oregon students would be the ones who would suffer without this protection for school districts. Have these students not already suffered enough over the last year?

Related to this, it will be difficult for Oregon districts to justify opening for in-person learning without having adequate protections against COVID-related lawsuits.

It is time to invest in our students. Providing COVID liability immunity is an important investment that does not cost the state any dollars.

Two final notes: employees are already covered by Workman's Compensation if they have any COVID-related issues. They can also make their concerns known through OSHA and ODE to insure school districts are providing appropriate health and safety safeguards. Also each school in the state has a rigorous blueprint that it has created, updated, and is required to follow. Districts have created these comprehensive protocols in partnership with ODE and OHA. Therefore, highly effective research-based safety measures are already in place across the state to promote the health and well-being of students and staff in schools.

In closing I urge you to provide liability immunity for schools in Oregon. This is in the best interest of all, especially Oregon's young people who have already sacrificed so much of their education due to no fault of their own.

Sincerely yours,

Paul Hillyer, Ph.D.
Klamath Falls City School Superintendent

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