

March 20, 2021

Senator Kathleen Taylor, Chair
Senate Committee on Redistricting
900 Court Street NE, S-423 Salem OR 97301

Representative Andrea Salinas, Chair
House Committee on Redistricting
900 Court Street NE, H-282 Salem OR 97301

Dear Chair Taylor, Chair Salinas, and Members of the Committees on Redistricting:

My name is Melissa Barnes Dholakia, I am a resident of Bend and District 2, and I serve as an elected official as the Vice Chair of the Bend-La Pine School Board. I am here in my individual capacity to advocate for consideration of the unique assets and needs of our region during redistricting, and in particular, the children and families who call our region their home.

Our region is rapidly growing - Bend at a rate of nearly 3% per year, our neighbors to the north in Redmond by nearly 4.5% annually. Together these two cities already have a population large enough for two dedicated, contiguous house seats - and that is only growing. In turn, Bend-La Pine School District is the 5th largest in our state. And again, rapidly growing - we build and open a new school every few years. For our students and families, this growth requires legislators that are honed into the needs of a growing metropolitan area - from education to transportation, affordable housing, business development, social services, environmental stewardship, tourism, and so much more. I urge the committee to consider the unique composition of our region - as both a major metropolitan center and as unique from the western corridor in terms of its sense of place.

Next, while our district is contiguous along the Highway 97 corridor - serving Bend, Three Rivers, Sunriver, and La Pine - we are currently represented by three different State House Representatives and two State Senators. Students, families, and staff of our district deserve to be known well, prioritized, and have clear collaboration with their elected officials - and their officials deserve the same in terms of the breadth of their constituents. I urge the committee to consider while redistricting the contiguous nature of the 97 corridor and its school district boundaries.

Finally, our region is rapidly diversifying. Whereas the last census indicated only 8% of Bend residents as BIPOC, 18% of the current Bend-La Pine School District students are. This continues to strengthen our district and enrich it. The delay of 2020 census data - due to the global pandemic and an abbreviated census period - threatens to limit this representation and voice. I urge the committee to consider any and all options available to you to ensure ALL members of our community are counted in making decisions on redistricting.

In Community,

Melissa Barnes Dholakia
Vice Chair, Bend-La Pine School Board