

Dear Chairman Dembrow, I strongly oppose SB 223. This bill is a significant threat to religious freedom and parental choice. It also undermines private education in Oregon by making it subject to oversight by the state.

Many years ago, voluntary private school registration was administered by the Oregon Dept. of Education (ODE) so that student teaching could take place in registered private schools and teachers in private schools could maintain their licenses. That licensing rule was eliminated in 2009. Then Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction, Suzan Castillo, asked the Oregon legislature to repeal the voluntary private school registration laws to reduce workload and expenditures, and because it did not align with ODE goals.

In 2011, the Oregon legislature repealed voluntary private school registration by adopting SB 26.

Currently, there is no law on the books requiring private schools to register with Oregon Department of Education. For Oregon's Christian schools, that independence allows us to provide a faith-based curriculum in line with our families' values and beliefs and free from state oversight. But that independence is at risk this session.

Oregon legislators have now introduced a bill, SB 223, that would require private schools to register with the state or risk their students' ability to participate in interscholastic activities—athletics, music, debate, etc. SB 223 uses students as leverage to force private schools, including Christian schools, to register and conform to State Board of Education criteria. SB 223 threatens religious freedom and parent choice and undermines the goal of private education. It also adds layers of bureaucracy and costs to the day-to-day management of private schools with little to no benefit to the families that are enrolled.

As I understand it, the underlying goal of SB 223 is to promote the safety and well-being of students. Fortunately, that's the goal of private schools as well. In 2019, legislation was passed to ensure that students are safe, rendering this bill unnecessary. Following the global pandemic, our students should be given the opportunity to reengage with their peers, not prevented from participating in the extracurricular activities that they enjoy.

It shouldn't matter what type of school our children attend. I sent my child to private school, and I also pay Oregon taxes that pay for Oregon's public education system. My children should have the same ability to participate in extracurricular activities as their public school peers.

Please don't use our students as leverage in political fights. I ask you to stand with parents, like me, and vote 'NO' on SB 223. It's unnecessary and will only harm our children.