

Dear Chairman Dembrow,

I strongly oppose SB 223. This bill is a significant threat to religious freedom and parental choice in education. It also undermines private education in Oregon by making it subject to oversight by the state and could require Christian schools to teach things in opposition to their Christian beliefs. I chose to enroll my child in faith-based, private education at East Linn Christian. That was my choice as a parent and one that I sacrificed financially for because of concerns I have with the way some things are done in public schools. As a long time public school substitute teacher and current Christian school teacher I have seen the importance of Christian schools in the education of young men and women. SB 223 would essentially force private schools to register with the state or cut off student access to choir, sports, and other interscholastic programs. Our schools already prioritize student safety, but this bill goes too far. It's unfair to punish our children by excluding them from enriching extracurricular activities that are currently offered to both public and private school students. Our school is currently a member of OSAA, and my child participates in basketball and track and field. Why would you take this opportunity away from my child, especially after the isolation created due to the COVID-19 pandemic? SB 223 adds expenses to private schools and early childhood programs with little (if any) benefit to the schools or students served by them. The Legislature passed a law in 2019 to protect private school students, and SB 223 is unnecessary in light of that legislation. My children attend East Linn Christian in Lebanon, and there's a reason that they don't attend public school. Faith is very important to my family, and we are looking for a different kind of education. I am also a teacher at East Linn Christian for the past 5 and a half years and have seen the positive impact it has had on student's lives while also providing an academic education that in my opinion is superior to public schools. It shouldn't matter what type of school our children attend. I send 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.

Thank you,

Kenneth Gerig

Teacher, East Linn Christian