

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

My name is Lane Shaffer and I'm a student at McDaniel High School in Portland, Oregon. My high school is within the Portland Public Schools district, which provides every single student with a free transportation pass. I've used it almost daily to go to sports, work, and soon, my first vaccine appointment. It has been an incredible resource for myself and my peers and, while I understand PPS is in a unique situation due to a lack of yellow bus service, students at schools like Reynolds, David Douglas, and Parkrose have directly expressed the necessity for free public transportation for students.

There are a plethora of reasons why public transportation should be made free for all youth (and eventually all people), but I understand that there is extremely limited funding at the moment and it is spread over a wide range of programs and investments. However, it is my belief that in order to successfully rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must allocate some of the American Rescue Plan Act funding to provide low-income students with free transportation access so that getting to vaccine appointments, school, employment, and extracurriculars have as few barriers as possible. I know there have been many community members expressing the need for increased funding for education at all levels, but unless we provide economically disadvantaged youth with the tools to access that education, there will not be as drastic an effect.

Additionally, services like student health centers, public libraries, and food pantries will only be made more accessible by instituting a free transit program. A relatively small investment into youth transportation will bolster countless other investments and work to rebuild our state after the devastating effects of the pandemic. Not only would it advance racial/economic equity and positively impact access to education and healthcare, but it would also have long-lasting effects on our climate. By giving people access to public transit at a young age, we build a base of dedicated ridership and bring more cars off of the roads.

This investment would also pair extremely well with recent funding of electric bus programs. Many transit agencies are actively trying to transition to more sustainable sources of energy, which is admirable. However, unless there is ridership to support that, it is not as effective. As most of you know, the ridership of public transit has dropped severely as a result of the pandemic. By providing free transit access to students, we can help to revitalize that ridership and work towards a greener, more accessible future.

I strongly urge you to use every funding source available to invest in free public transportation for youth, especially those that are low-income. This will:

1. Advance racial and economic equity by eliminating barriers to travel
2. Increase access to healthcare, including vaccine appointments and mental health care, by eliminating the cost barrier for youth
3. Positively impact the environment by revitalizing public transit ridership and bringing more cars off of roads
4. Increase the impact of other investments being considered with ARPA funding as well as increasing the impact of existing services

Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony. If you have any questions you can contact me at lane.shaffer@gmail.com.

Have a wonderful evening,

Lane Shaffer
Portland Area High School Student