

My name is Nicolas Townsend and I am the Garden Program Supervisor for the Growing Minds Garden at Serendipity Center's therapeutic school. I fully support the capital construction allocation requested by Serendipity, and my testimony today is also in favor of restoring Farm to School funding for Oregon schools.

Serendipity launched our therapeutic garden seven years ago, and for the past three years, expansion of the garden program has been funded through an investment of Farm to School dollars from the Oregon Department of Education. Serendipity students have highly complex needs stemming from challenges they face due to disabling conditions, trauma, and/or generational poverty.

Since its inception, our garden and the people who keep it growing have been teaching our students where their food comes from and how beautiful, delicious and accessible local food systems can be. Support for Oregon farmers starts by raising Oregon kids who know and love local food. The ODE Farm to School Grant program ensures the kids most in need of that education receive it. Oregon has committed to providing a meaningful and equitable education for all learners which should include access to the outdoors, and opportunities for service learning and community involvement. Without experiences offered by school gardens, children who already have reduced chances of remaining in school, finding purpose, and seeing themselves as contributors in their community will struggle more to succeed.

Please do all you can to restore funding for the Oregon Farm to School Grant Program to 15 million dollars, the level of the last biennium. Thank you.