

**DEB PATTERSON
STATE SENATOR/SENADORA ESTATAL
DISTRICT/DISTRITO 10**



OREGON STATE SENATE/SENADO DEL ESTADO DE OREGON

Feb. 24, 2021

Chair Williams, Vice Chair Leif and Ruiz and Honorable Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Deb Patterson, State Senator for Senate District 10. I am here to testify in support of HB 2544. For those of you who aren't familiar with Senate District 10, the main school districts in this area are the Cascades School District, Salem-Keizer School District and Central School District. According to the Oregon Department of Education, 114 students in the Cascades School District have reported experiencing homelessness, and 10 students reported they were houseless *and* separated from their parents or guardians. In the Salem-Keizer School District, over 200 students identify themselves as unaccompanied homeless youth. In Central School District, 60 students reported experiencing houselessness, and 24 identified as unaccompanied houseless youth.

I want you to take a moment to remember when you were in grade school - waking up early to catch the bus or walk to school, learning and engaging in class, playing at recess and coming home to do homework. Likely, many of you had a home to return to -- a warm bed, food and a good family. But these students, nearly 400 students in my district alone, come to school exhausted, if they can make it at all. Many likely haven't had breakfast and won't have money for lunch. Between 40 and 60% of them will return to their families and be met with physical abuse. 20-40% will be met with sexual abuse. I cannot begin to imagine the physical and mental toll it takes on anyone to be homeless, let alone homeless and in an abusive household with no way out.

Every day we do not act, we are failing our children and the future of our state. As others have and will mention, Oregon has the highest rate of youth houselessness in the U.S. and these numbers have only increased with families struggling financially and emotionally through COVID-19.

This bill is not a cure-all. But, even if it only helps a handful of students, it will be worth it. We must use every tool in our tool box to help these thousands of children who desperately need us to step up for them.

Thank you,

Deb Patterson