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Colt Gill

Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction

HB 4026: Wildfire-impacted School Districts Funding

House Revenue Committee

February 3, 2022

Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Reschke and members of the House Revenue Committee, my name is Nicole Peterson and I am the Legislative Coordinator for the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4026, which will help bring some stability to school districts and communities still recovering from devastating wildfires.

Background

Our state experienced incredible loss in the 2020 wildfire season. The images of glowing red skies and endless smoke will remain with many of us for a long time to come. Some lost everything; entire communities changed overnight and families—and our students—were left to pick up the pieces. While many stepped up to provide shelter and supplies, the work to recover from this kind of destruction takes long-term attention and support. As a state, we must do all we can to support our youth and make these towns whole again.

Several of the school districts in these communities are starting to see a loss of students due to student displacement as a result of the wildfires. The infrastructure of the community and some of the places our students call home were destroyed, and rebuilding these physical structures takes time and sustained financial resources.

Existing statute provides that all districts get the greater of the previous year's weighted average daily membership (ADMw) or the current year's ADMw as a basis for funding. Because districts are paid on ADMw basis, which is based on the number of students and needs in a district, these districts could see a significant drop in revenue. This means as it currently stands, districts will be hindered in providing services to remaining and displaced students, exactly at a time when these students need the most support.

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The grant will provide funding due to loss of ADM attributed to the 2020 wildfires through an additional grant. The goal of this grant is to provide stable funding and make up State School Fund and Student Investment Account money that is being lost because of student displacement. The duration would be for school years 2021-22 to 2024-25. The grant will provide resources to assist school districts and the students that have been displaced until a

time when the infrastructure and housing in these communities can be restored. This funding could play an integral role in providing some stability for those students and their families that have been displaced and assist with the recovery of these communities.

Fiscal Impact

The grant will provide one-time funding of \$25 million to school districts impacted by the 2020 wildfires who had a loss of infrastructure and housing in their communities; four school districts have been estimated to qualify for this grant. The work for this grant is expected to be absorbed by current staff at ODE.

Equity Impact

There are underserved populations within the boundaries of the districts impacted by the 2020 wildfires. Providing these school districts with the additional funding could allow the districts to address the needs of underserved students and their families. However, funds distributed from the State School Funds (SSF) are subject to local control. Each school district would need to use the additional grant funds to prioritize reaching these underserved student populations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments, and we welcome any questions you may have. We urge your support of HB 4026.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Peterson

Legislative Coordinator