

House Bill 2739 Testimony

Chair Neron and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Ben Bowman, and I am the state representative for House District 25. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2739.

The issue of determining an accurate Current Service Level for public schools may seem technical—but it is critical to student success.

There are many challenges our public education system faces, and many opportunities in front of us this session: early literacy, summer learning, workforce development, and many more. Many of these ideas, including several that I strongly support, will cost additional dollars. My message to you today is that identifying an accurate CSL is part of an essential foundation we must lay in order to successfully address these challenges and seize these opportunities.

Here's what I mean by that: if the CSL number is not an accurate reflection of the costs facing schools, the consequence is that districts will receive less money than they need to continue their current operations. Another word for that is "underfunding." Every school district must balance their budget every year. Because the vast majority of spending in districts are for personnel costs, when schools are underfunded by the state, they are often faced with a painful choice: they can either lay off educators, or they can cut school days. In effect, that means larger class sizes or less learning time. Both of which negatively impact the students we are charged to serve.

As you know, determining an accurate current service level number is complex. But the process that the state uses to calculate that number should be transparent and inclusive of the people and organizations that we charge with delivering public education at the local level. This bill is not overly prescriptive: it brings experts to the table to collaboratively determine an accurate number to reflect the cost of current operations in the next budgeting cycle. To me, that approach is both fair and responsible.

I urge your support of HB 2739 to bring accuracy, stability, and transparency to the budgeting process for Oregon's public education system. Thank you.