

Esteem Chair Neron and Members of the Committee,

My name is Miriam G. Cummins and I am here speaking on my behalf as a school board member, single parent of two children one being Neurodiverse, and as an Oregonian.

I am here before you, in support of HB 2753 which will allow school board members to receive a monthly stipend. I can tell you that from my personal lived experience as a single parent and school board member, it has been hard navigating the system that is not intended for us. As this is a volunteer position we do not get compensated for doing this civic duty. In that comes accrued costs that impact the level of engagement, which I, for example, can do as a board member. Being one of the youngest and being a single parent on my board, it has been difficult to find care for my children while I am doing my duties as an elected board member. As I know this is not a Bill for childcare, there are expenses that come from finding specialized care as I have a child with special needs. I take my position as a school board member seriously because more than ever our students need us to advocate and fight for them so that they can get the resources and education that they need to succeed and thrive. Which brings me to these important points that I would like to address with you all.

As we have seen, there are many barriers that have prevented individuals, especially and not limited to single parents who have young children to be able to run for school board as this is an unpaid position. However, offering a stipend will create the opportunity to not only have a diverse range of candidates for school board but to also consider how other elected positions could benefit from having an initiative like this one. I see this as a stepping stone, moving in the right direction. This Bill creates an opportunity to help alleviate some of the costs that we accrue while serving our community. Right now, depending on the school district's policy of funding allocated in their budget, some of the costs that come from attending training in and out-of-state like paying for transportation and food are not covered, and hence come out of pocket. Other examples include, gas to attend the meetings in person; even though there are districts that are offering hybrid modules there are also costs associated with that which are internet and cell phone costs. What this Bill will allow is for school districts to determine what and how those reimbursements will be. Right now, we do not have that option.

I love serving my community. As I know you do too. But ask yourselves. Would you be able to afford and do your civic duty as an elected official if you did not receive a compensation for your time and service? We do this work because we have a passion for doing what is right and uplifting those voices. But we also need to consider who is at the table, why, and what can we do to create opportunities so that we have a wide range of voices in these positions.

For these reasons, I urge you to support this Bill so that we, together, can move forward in paving the way for what we would love to see Oregon be when it comes to representation.

Thank you!

Miriam G. Cummins

Mother
School Board Member