



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of HB 3014

February 20, 2023

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, Members of the Committee:

My name is Khanh Pham and I am State Representative for House District 46, which encompasses outer Southeast Portland. Thank you for the opportunity to bring this bill forward today. HB 3014 is a response to the mounting pressures on our K-12 school system and Safe Routes to School programs.

Many students in Oregon lack the ability to get to school safely due to insufficient infrastructure for pedestrians. For example, a lot of the streets in my district don't have sidewalks, and yet my district is criss-crossed by some of the most dangerous corridors in the state. We've had 3 deaths on Powell Boulevard in the last 6 months, sit with that. We are in the midst of an epidemic of traffic violence, and students have to cross dangerous roads like Powell, the 205 Freeway, and 82nd Ave every day to get to school.

So even though students in these neighborhoods may only live a short distance from school, the district buses them because they can't be expected to make it to school on their own. This has been our model for years, where schools have increased their transportation costs to make up for the lack of safe sidewalks and roads in the community.

But our K-12 system also has strained capacity. Bus drivers are a critical component of our school system, yet they are some of the hardest positions to fill. The work is not easy and the hours can be a challenge. Often people qualified to drive buses can find higher wages outside of the public school system. So it is not surprising that as businesses of all types struggle to hire enough employees, our schools are facing an acute crisis in student transportation. School districts across Oregon are in need of bus drivers and students and families are being impacted.

This bill does not fix our systemic challenges. It doesn't improve transportation infrastructure and it won't increase bus drivers in schools. Both of those are worthy goals that this body should seriously consider investing in. But the conversation today is about how we can give our school districts the tools they need to get students to school safely *now, despite* our workforce crisis and inadequate infrastructure.

HB 3014 comes as the result of transportation advocates reaching out to me and school districts reaching out to Rep. Neron with nearly identical requests. We've partnered with Rep. Hoa Nguyen and combined our efforts into a single bill that will have forthcoming amendments. The details of those amendments are still being worked out with stakeholders, but I can share the principles guiding our work and vision.

Currently, districts have limited support when it comes to meeting their transportation needs via methods other than busing. For example, they may be reimbursed for using **outside contractors** or providing payments to families in lieu of transportation, but they cannot currently be reimbursed for things like walking or biking buses. If a district needs to utilize transportation methods outside of what is considered standard, the district bears that cost without any reimbursement from the state. This creates a financial disincentive for districts to be creative in solving their transportation problems.

Our aim with HB 3014 is to remove such barriers. We want to ensure school districts have the flexibility and local control necessary to navigate this workforce shortage in a way that best meets the needs of their students and families. Under this proposal districts won't be entitled to any *additional* transportation funding; they just won't lose money by using bus alternatives. School districts are doing all the best they can. We need to help them help their students.

We are looking to ODE's current process for supplemental transportation plans and waivers as a model for creating a process where districts would apply to the State Board of Education in order to be reimbursed for certain alternative modes of transportation. By building on this existing process, we can make sure appropriate sideboards are in place to prioritize student safety and to ensure public dollars are being used prudently.

Examples of sideboards likely in forthcoming amendments include:

- Requiring proposals to have the approval of local school boards
- Requiring districts to demonstrate the need for the use of alternative transportation
- Requiring districts to provide a cost comparison to ensure the use of alternative transportation does not increase their slice of the State School Fund Transportation Grant

We are working with stakeholders to bring forward a future amendment that My hope is that today's conversation can center the experiences of our school districts, students, and families and focus on why this bill is so needed. I urge your support for HB 3014

Thank you.