



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of HB3014

February 20, 2023

Chair Neron, Vice Chair Wright, Vice Chair Hudson, and Members of the Committee,

Currently I work as a Student and Community Engagement Specialist at Clackamas Education Service District. Before this, I was a School Attendance Coach at PPS for nearly a decade. One of the biggest barriers to student success is equitable access to transit and transportation. This disproportionately impacts low-income and rural school districts.

Our yellow school bus drivers are an integral part of getting students to school safely, and are doing their best; but as we see across so many other industries, there is a critical workforce challenge. This results in canceled bus routes often leaving students unable to get to school. Walking is frequently not an option, because walking conditions are unsafe. In my district in East Portland, it is well known that our neighborhoods lack sidewalks and we have one of the highest traffic pedestrian fatality rates.

As a School Attendance Coach I organized a few walking school buses as an intervention to chronic absenteeism. I saw the positive effects that it had on student's school performance, their mental and physical health, and social skills. In 2016, I worked with Terese Harris, a parent at Jason Elementary School, who provided written testimony, to organize a Walking School Bus for students who lived within walking distance from the school. We coordinated safe, fun, and supervised walking routes, to address the attendance and tardy challenges we were seeing.

We collaborated with teachers, the PTA, community organizations, and the Portland Bureau of Transportation's Safe Routes to School team, who provided resources and incentives for students such as umbrellas, bike gear, and snacks to make walking to school exciting for students.

During our walking routes we learned about the community our students lived in and the challenges they had getting to school. Some of the students lived in motels along NE 82nd avenue; their parents were focused on survival and could not always make sure their kids got to school. Most students weren't allowed to walk to school unsupervised because drivers often sped through residential roads where they walk.

However, after a few weeks, kids were excited about coming to school and both parents and the students were looking forward to the Walking School Bus. I'm proud to say that we saw attendance improve by 30%. We also saw a significant decrease in disruptive classroom behavior from these students, because they were able to get out all their wiggles and jitters on the morning walk to school.

Unfortunately, after Terese and I left the school, the Walking School Bus did not continue. This grassroots community effort takes a lot of coordination, time and resources from volunteers. I would like to see the Walking School Bus be available to all students and schools across the state, but not every school has a parent like Terese, or a principal like the one at Jason Lee who saw the value of this work and had the funds to compensate her.

Currently, bus service is the only transportation option that school districts are able to get reimbursed by from the State School Transportation Fund.

HB3014 will give school districts the ability to pay for additional multi-modal transportation needs out of their existing transportation budgets. HB 3014 recognizes the flexibility schools need to meet the unforeseen challenges in getting students to school safely and on time. As we struggle to serve our students equitably, schools have to combine resources where they can to ensure students are getting the most out of their education, and that doesn't stop inside the classroom. That is why I am proud to be a co-chief sponsor with Rep Khanh Pham on the School Transportation Options Bill.

Thank you,
Rep. Hoa Nguyen

