

Date: February 23rd, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Stephanie Phillips Bridges, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland

Re: Support for Toxic Free Schools, SB 426

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 426. My name is Stephanie Phillips Bridges, and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Under the Healthy and Safe Schools Act, passed in 2017, school districts are required to report the presence of lead, asbestos and radon - and pesticide use - to the Department of Education on a regular basis. Schools have been doing a good job of testing and reporting lead, asbestos and radon, but not pesticides. "86% of school districts have up-to-date Healthy and Safe Schools reports on their websites, compared to only 39% of schools posting up-to-date school Integrated Pest Management plans on their websites (updated within the last 5 years since the Healthy and Safe Schools Act was adopted in 2017)."¹ Ensuring the continued safety and health of our students is of the utmost importance. Due to their developing organs, children are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of pesticides which have been linked to a variety of health problems, including respiratory issues and developmental delays. "This is especially true for Black students because they are disproportionately exposed to and affected by environmental hazards, such as pesticides, which can negatively impact their health and academic success."²

Senate Bill 426 recognizes this fact and prioritizes the health and safety of our students by creating a "prevention-first" method of pest control in schools. In practice, this includes providing technical assistance to schools and districts regarding integrated pest management plans, and establishing recommendations for reducing exposure to pesticides. It also means that this work has to be funded; Oregon's School Districts have never received adequate resources to implement the requirements of the Oregon School Integrated Pest Management law and the Healthy and Safe Schools Act. Schools need help to meet these requirements in order to protect students' health. As recently as 2020, Oregon schools have been found out of compliance and, in some cases, incurred thousands of dollars in civil penalties or letters of violation.

By improving the requirements of the Healthy and Safe Schools Plan, this bill will help ensure that all students have a safe and healthy learning environment free from exposure to harmful chemicals. School districts need a simple and easy electronic

¹ Oregon Department of Education, Healthy and Safe Schools, 2022.

² Milman, Oliver, The Guardian, Air Pollution: Black, Hispanic and Poor Students Most at Risk from Toxins –Study, 2018.

record keeping system to ensure they have 4 years of complete pesticide application records, as required by law. Accuracy and transparency are reasonable goals. We must stop the unfair practices of charging parents thousands of dollars merely to get a paper copy of pesticide application records for their child's school district. SB 426 will use modern technology to create and store pesticide application records and make it easy, and more equitable, to properly notify parents, students, and teachers of pesticide applications, as is required by law.

The health and wellbeing of our students should be our top priority, and this bill helps ensure that schools have the resources and support they need to minimize exposure to pesticides and protect our students. Senate Bill 426 will help support the healthy development of our students by reducing their exposure to toxic chemicals that may weaken their maturing immune systems. It will also help ensure that all students, regardless of their background or the income level of their community, have access to safe and healthy learning environments. I urge the committee to support this critical piece of legislation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephanie Phillips Bridges'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Stephanie' being the most prominent.

Stephanie Phillips Bridges
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