

March 1, 2023

To: House Committee on Education
From: Angela Bonilla, President, Portland Association of Teachers
RE: Support for HB 3178, Teacher Scholars Program expansion

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Hudson and members of the committee—

My name is Angela Bonilla and I am currently the President of the Portland Association of Teachers. When I am not on release from my classroom, I am typically a Dual Language Immersion Elementary Teacher at Portland Public Schools. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in front of you today to express my support for HB 3178, which will allow Oregon's Teacher Scholars Program a much needed expansion.

I am supportive of this bill because I was an educator who had grants and scholarships to help me go through my Residency Teaching program. When I was asked as a kindergartener what I wanted to be when I grew up, as a child of immigrants, my first answer was always, "President of the United States". This is what my parents told me I could be because I was born in this country. As I grew, I realized that what I really wanted to do was help build a better world and I could do that through politics, or by becoming a teacher.

However, life got in the way. I graduated HS in 2006 during the "once in a lifetime recession". I dropped out of my college to work on the Obama election in New Mexico because I wanted to affect change. Unfortunately, my want to change the world again coincided with banks being unable and unwilling to give out loans for me to return to college to earn my BA and eventually my teaching degree. I had to move across the country to work, finish my education and eventually build my career as a teacher. It took 12 years from my senior year of high school until I was finally fully licensed to teach students.

As an Afro Latina educator, I know that folks like me are rarely leading the classroom. My students often told me that I was the first Black teacher they ever had. I believe that programs like this are a critical part of the state infrastructure to knock down barriers to becoming an educator, especially those often disenfranchised or marginalized in our communities.

According to a 2022 report release from the Educator Advancement Council, even though the number of teacher, principal and administrator candidates enrolling in Oregon's preparation programs increases, we see a decrease in program completion overall. The report cites that with each milestone towards employment in education, fewer and fewer diverse candidates are present and completing the program— many who do not complete their teacher prep programs say tuition and increasing costs are a barrier. That's why the Teacher Scholars Program is so important. In addition, the proposal to expand the access to these benefits to the certified professionals that serve our students is critically important. We need teachers and we need counselors, social workers, school psychologists and everyone with the skills and sense of duty

to serve our students. We should be making it easier for those folks to complete a program and serve our students. This bill is an important step in that direction.

In addition, we know that the 2022 awards were maxed out, meeting the need of many who see tuition as a barrier for their path to the profession. If we want to meet the challenges of the workforce shortage we have today, we must fully utilize the tools we have for recruitment, like tuition remittance programs, and expand on the idea so we don't leave a single student behind.

In the midst of a workforce crisis, this is a forward-looking solution that centers the bridge between what allows our inspired students in the classroom to envision a path to becoming a future educator and a direct benefit to our incoming workforce.

I encourage the committee to support HB 3178. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Angela Bonilla
Elementary Spanish Immersion teacher at Portland Public Schools
President of the Portland Association of Teachers