

Sara A. Gelser Blouin

State Senator

District 8



Oregon State Senate

March 8, 2023

Dear Chair Neron and members of the committee:

Thank you for taking testimony on HB 3068 which would allow students completing a GED to receive a diploma. I have long been a fierce defender of the importance of the integrity of a high school diploma and an advocate for supporting more students to achieve meaningful high school completion. I support this measure because it is consistent with both of those values.

We know that high school graduation remains persistently out of reach for some students, despite their capacity and skill. Housing instability, recent immigration, economic instability that requires students to earn wages, foster care and chronic illness are just a few examples of circumstances that pose seemingly insurmountable obstacles to the regular attendance required to fulfill all of the credit requirements of a high school diploma. That is different than having the capacity to demonstrate the proficiencies we expect of high school graduates--- a standard that many students in these circumstances meet or even exceed.

Unfortunately, we also know that despite the soft and hard skills these students may demonstrate, the lack of a high school diploma impairs the economic outlook for these students. The inability to check "high school graduate" on a job application can stop an individual from even being interviewed for a position and in some cases precludes individuals from pursuing certain professional licensures and endorsements. This creates financial hardships that increase the likelihood of a new generation of students that have reduced life opportunities due to economic circumstances.

In addition, these students are kids that work hard. They are supporting their families, surviving major life challenges, recovering from illness or addiction and overcoming trauma and separation. Despite this, they do not have the opportunity to experience a major life rite-of-passage--- walking across a graduation stage.

A GED is intended to be a proficiency based test through which a student can demonstrate their acquisition of knowledge equivalent to the knowledge required of a student to graduate. However, under current law, it does not confer the same benefits.

HB 3068 remedies this while also protecting the integrity of the diploma. If passed, a student with a GED would be able to celebrate the accomplishment by walking alongside their peers in a graduation ceremony and receiving a diploma to recognize their accomplishments in school. They would also be able to mark on job and other applications that they have completed high school. These are huge benefits to a student.

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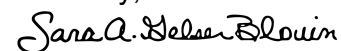
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At the same time, even with HB 3068, the integrity of the standard diploma would be protected. This is because when an individual applies for financial aid, post secondary school admission, a license or certification and certain employment opportunities a transcript is often required. This transcript will remain accurate—demonstrating the courses completed, the grade point average and credits attained. Federal standards would also not be compromised as districts would still report GED completers as required. This would allow districts to be evaluated for their high school completion rates appropriately, without imposing unnecessary limitations on students when they seek employment or other opportunities.

I know a little bit about this because I do not have a high school diploma. I also do not have a GED. Even though I have earned a graduate degree, I am often surprised by the number of times I must acknowledge on demographic forms, applications or other documents that I am not a high school graduate. When I encounter this, I find myself time and again thinking about those GED earners that worked so hard to pass that test while managing the kinds of life challenges many adults can't begin to imagine. There is so much stigma that we as a society attach to individuals who do not obtain a standard diploma. For these hard working students, that stigma and judgement is revisited every time they complete one of these forms. HB 3068 would eliminate that by allowing students to check the box indicating that they completed high school.

Thank you again for your consideration of this measure. A high school diploma should not be an iron curtain that falls at age 18, separating diploma earners from non-diploma earners. HB 3068 chips away at that curtain and creates greater opportunity across the lifespan for Oregon students experiencing the most challenging life circumstances.

Sincerely,



Sara Gelser Blouin