

Submitter: Simone Baumgartner
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB854

Thank you Chair Dembrow and members of the committee for this opportunity to speak.

My name is Simone Baumgartner and I am a senior at Lake Oswego High School. I am here today testifying in support of SB 854, which would require each school district to develop a written plan establishing climate change instructional programs for grades k-12 by June 1, 2026.

A little over two years ago we experienced record breaking temperatures in Oregon. With them came an increase in wildfires, and in turn a dense, smothering layer of smoke that settled over our communities. I remember sitting on the hardwood floors in my kitchen, holding ice cubes to my forehead as I scrolled through inventive salad recipes online, fearful of turning on the stove and losing the little amount of cool we had been able to keep inside after covering windows with curtains and surrounding ourselves with fans. A feeling of hopelessness had settled within me during those weeks as I grew spiteful of the smoke, it's invasiveness closing up my lungs and stealing my stamina every time I tried to leave the house. Eventually we conceded, turning to the Holiday Inn on the outskirts of town and seeking refuge inside its air conditioned halls.

At the time I did not understand why our summers were changing so drastically, but as I participated in classes like Ecology and Sustainability, which I am privileged to have as options at my school, I began to understand just how connected our actions are to the current environmental issues we face. I saw how our unwillingness to listen to those who warned of these effects and adapt the way we use earth's resources to cause less harm worked to quicken the changing of our climate. Not only did my experience with proper climate education offer me different perspectives of the world in which I live, but allowed me to explore the varying solutions offered by those dedicated to combating climate change.

This legislation will ensure that all students in Oregon are given the opportunity to understand the new reality we face and, hopefully, make a positive difference, whether in their own school or at a larger scale.

I urge you to please listen to the voices of youth and prioritize access to equitable climate justice education in our public schools. Thank you for your time and allowing me the opportunity to speak today.