

TRAVIS NELSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 44
NORTH/NORTHEAST PORTLAND



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of House Bill 3515

March 30, 2023

Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Lewis and Tran, and members of the committee,

I am Travis Nelson, State Representative for House District 44 - North and Northeast Portland which used to be home to the now closed Columbia Pool. Committee members, I am here today in support of House Bill 3515 because I believe with better funding, Columbia Pool would not have had millions of dollars in deferred maintenance. Columbia Pool would still be serving North Portland.

Parks and recreation services provide important economic, environmental, and health benefits to our communities. They help to meet the needs of young and old alike, give people a way to stay active and engaged, contribute to the livability of our neighborhoods, and provide green spaces in dense urban areas. These are among the reasons I championed a budget request in the 2022 legislative session to support my district's North Portland Aquatic Center to fill the void left by the closing of Columbia Pool. This is why I am supporting Commissioner Dan Ryan and the Portland Parks & Recreation's effort to give our community another tool to support these vital services.

We all agree about the value and importance of parks in our communities, so I want to really emphasize what this bill does and what it does *not* do. First – what does this bill really do? As I understand it, under current state law only a county commission or an independently elected board can form and govern a park and recreation district. That probably makes sense for some communities where the county manages parks, but that's not the case in Portland where the city owns and manages parks. All this bill does is add a City Council to the list of entities that can govern a parks district in addition to a County Commission and Independent Board. This bill is also limited to cities with a population of more than 600,000 and therefore would only apply to the City of Portland.

Equally as important is what this bill does *not* do. First and foremost, it *does not* create any new tax or property tax compression. Our constituents will *not* feel a further financial burden because of this proposed legislation. This bill also does *not* create a special district, nor does it remove or take away any existing authorities or options related to park and recreation districts. And finally, it does *not* create any loophole to get around Measures 5 and 50.

If HB 3515 were to be enacted, it would still take a vote of the people to put any park and recreation district and association revenue structure in place. As our neighbors to the north in Olympia and Seattle have shown us, this model of governance for a park and recreation district is highly effective for providing steady and sufficient services in larger cities. HB 3515 will give residents of Portland a choice to put a governance structure in place that will provide more stability for their outdoor services without creating the redundant administrative burdens that would come with a fully independent district or the confusion of whom to address constituents' questions and concerns.

Parks make up such an important part of our landscape. This is an idea that will help to benefit my community for generations to come. I urge you to give Portland residents a chance to make this decision for themselves. I urge you to pass this bill out of committee.

Thank you,

State Representative Travis Nelson
House District 44, North/NE Portland