

Good evening Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means -

My name is Andrew Mhoon, and I am a sophomore student at Sprague High School. I play second base for Sprague's Varsity Baseball Team.

On behalf of the youth in Salem, I am here to ask you to support \$3 million in funding for artificial turf and lights on a baseball and softball field in Salem's Bush Park. These fields would be shared by all of the Salem High Schools as well as other youth sports programs.

None of the Salem high schools have turf baseball fields. As you know, Oregon can be very wet in the spring - as we have definitely seen this year. Because it is almost impossible to play baseball on a dirt field in the rain, but very doable to play on an artificial turf field in the rain, my team had to travel to schools (mainly in Portland) just to get our games in during most of this season. We were only able to have one home game out of our first 14 games. Almost all of the high schools in the Portland area have turf fields because they know how necessary having turf is to be able to play baseball in Oregon. Because we had to travel to so many away games, my teammates and I had to leave school early and miss countless class periods, and also get home very late into the evening, which makes it difficult to balance being an athlete and a successful student. I know some of my teammates and I are still trying to recover from missing assignments and classes this season.

Having a dirt field also requires a lot more manual labor and expensive upkeep. I know our coach spends at least 10 hours a week himself taking care of the field - which includes mowing the grass, raking the dirt, pulling weeds, and tarping the mound. After every practice and game, our team spends at least a half an hour cleaning up the field - raking the dirt, sweeping base paths, and tarping home plate.

Having access to a playable turf field is especially important to kids who don't have the means or ability to travel an hour to Portland to play on a club or travel baseball team.

As we know, mental health has become a bigger factor in everyone's lives since the pandemic. Baseball is a way for kids to be able to forget about their problems, be outside, and have fun. In Oregon, having turf gives kids more of an opportunity to do this.

To me, baseball is more than just a game. It has given me opportunities to make friends and many memories. It is the dinners after games with my teammates, the before practice conversations, and the bus rides home after a big win. That is what makes baseball so special and great! My coach always says, the best memories you will ever make will be with your teammates out in the field, having fun.

Playing baseball teaches you how to work hard, how to persevere, stay disciplined, and how to improvise, along with many other life skills. I hope you will consider supporting the \$3 million request for the turf field project to provide the youth in Salem opportunities like this.