

COURTNEY NERON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 26



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of HB 2098 -3

April 27, 2023

Co-Chairs McLain and Frederick, Vice Chairs Boshart Davis & Boquist, members of the committee:

My name is Courtney Neron, state representative for House District 26.

While I definitely support the intention of HB 2098, the Interstate Bridge Replacement bill, to invest in a seismically resilient interstate bridge with multimodal transportation options, I am concerned about the -2 Amendment which commits to pay for the entire \$1 billion commitment using 100% General Obligation bonds, which will be paid out from our General Fund obligations.

As a classroom teacher for many years and the current Chair of the House Education Committee, my colleagues, students and I experienced extreme temperatures, broken HVAC systems, and lack of air circulation. Imagine teaching in a room filled with 39 teenagers, where the windows could not open, the HVAC was broken and it was uncomfortably hot. I used to teach with sweat dripping down my back – the reward for answering questions was being misted with a spray bottle. I have taught in stairwells when wings of a school were shut due to asbestos, classrooms with buckets on the ground to catch drips from leaky roofs, and schools with mold issues.

I know that schools depend on General Obligation bonds to pay for building and retrofitting school facilities. I'm am worried that if we take out \$250 Million from our General Obligation bonds each biennium for the next 4 biennia, this will constrain our ability to fund critical school facility projects like seismic retrofitting, upgrading HVAC systems, repairing drinking water systems to remove contaminants like lead, and eliminating asbestos, radon sources, mold and other hazards that pose serious health risks to our children and educators.

My understanding is that for the most part, our freeways, roads, and bridges have historically been funded through Transportation taxes and fees—through our gas tax, through weight mile taxes for freight, through our vehicle registration fees, and through federal grants.

While I understand that we might have to allocate a portion—maybe 25% of the funding to come from General Obligation bonds, I think the vast majority of funding for this project should come from transportation-restricted funding.

I'm concerned that we are asking our kids to shoulder cuts, be packed into unhealthy classrooms, but our transportation system isn't planning equivalent cuts or living within its means. Right-sizing and appropriately prioritizing dollars available for freeway projects will ensure that our GO Bonds are available for a wider array of critically needed infrastructure.

I support building a seismically resilient bridge—AND seismically resilient schools, and education capital construction projects, much of which depend on General Obligation bonds.

That's why I support the -3 amendment that Rep Pham has introduced, which lowers the ask from General Fund bonds to \$250 million, allowing Oregon to commit to the bridge moving forward, and allows Oregon to apply for federal funding without eating up desperately needed revenue for education. The -3 amendment also contains fiscal guardrails that will ensure the state doesn't get overextended in spending on this bridge and we can make sure that the design pencils out, as we learn how much federal funding we will receive, or how much toll revenue we can expect.

We can have **both** the education projects and an I5 replacement bridge if the IBR bill is right-sized to cut down on expenses and put in fiscal guardrails.

Sincerely,

Rep. Courtney Neron

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Courtney Neron". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.