



## Office of the Senate President

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Rob Wagner, State Senator for Senate District 19 and I serve as President of the Oregon Senate. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 1502 — the Education Board Transparency bill.

As many of you know, I got my start in elected service on the Lake Oswego School Board in 2017. I grew up in Lake Oswego, graduated from local public schools, and my children attended school there as well. By the time I was elected, the Lake Oswego School Board had been recording its meetings and posting them online for more than 10 years. As active parents and community members, that meant that when myself or my wife or neighbors wanted to be engaged in our local school board, we were able to look back and see what they talked about at their most recent meeting despite our busy schedules.

During the coronavirus pandemic, many more school districts learned the value of streaming their meetings online and allowing for virtual participation so parents, teachers and students could stay engaged. However, working parents who couldn't watch the meeting live would still miss out on critical information since every school district does not upload their previous meetings.

This is a simple bill. It would require all K-12 school boards, public universities and community colleges to stream and post their meetings online and allow for remote participation in those meetings. This will improve the transparency of our education boards, grant greater access to these important public meetings, and promote equity by ensuring that all are able to stay engaged regardless of work schedules, economic means, distance or disability.

The Legislature has done great work over the years in improving equitable access to public meetings. For example, we recently made it possible for every legislative committee hearing to include ASL interpretation. Federal law already requires that all live-streamed meetings must be accessible to individuals with disabilities — under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act — through closed captioning services that provide a verbatim account of what is happening. These statutes make access to public hearings possible for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Without these laws, a huge population of Oregonians would not have the same level of access to participate in their communities. As we know, school districts are responsible for ensuring that closed captioning services are available and accurate, even if it is not specifically requested.



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With this bill, our hope is to make it easier for more people to stay involved in the decisions and conversations happening at their educational boards. Requiring online participation will help parents, students, people working multiple jobs, people with disabilities, and people without means of transportation to ask questions of their elected officials and stay informed.

Many school districts — large and small — already stream and post their meetings online. Costs are minimal and the technology is widely available. After I testified on this bill last month, I received an email from Tim Fain, who is a member of the Dufur School Board. Dufur School District has 350 students. Tim was excited about this bill. The Dufur School District covers a large geographic area, which makes it difficult for parents to attend school board meetings, something Tim shared he experienced as a board member. I asked Tim if it was all right if I could share a portion of his email:

*For a small district I can promise you that:*

- 1. It's no extra cost to us. We already stream via the internet.*
- 2. For a small district we have the infrastructure to implement SB 1502. And as a quip: anyone with a cell phone has the infrastructure. It's not that difficult.*
- 3. It would garner good will and trust among our community.*
- 4. There should be no hesitancy from elected officials for the public to see what they are talking about unless it falls into the category of executive session.*

Now that you've heard about what this bill will do to improve transparency, access and equity in our educational board meetings, let me tell you a few things it won't do. SB 1502 will not require that school boards take testimony online when they weren't already taking in-person testimony. This bill will not make executive sessions public. And this bill will not overburden small school districts.

What could be more important than including all voices in our democracy — especially as it relates to our children and decisions that impact their education. Thank you for taking the time to consider SB 1502.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert A. Wagner".

Senator Rob Wagner