

Submitter: Devon Lawson-McCourt
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1534

To the Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I come before you today, not just as a voice of opposition but as a conduit for the collective concern of our communities, which find themselves on the precipice of a decision that could fundamentally alter the educational landscape in Oregon for generations. Senate Bill 1534 proposes a measure that, while perhaps well-intentioned in its effort to address teacher shortages, undermines the very foundation of our public education system by allowing individuals not licensed or registered with the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission to teach reading to students.

At first glance, the pragmatism of SB 1534 might seem appealing, especially in the face of the pressing teacher shortage crisis. However, it is a dangerous oversimplification of a complex issue, a mere Band-Aid on a gaping wound. By permitting unlicensed individuals to teach reading, we risk devaluing the profession of teaching, eroding educational standards, and, most critically, jeopardizing the educational outcomes of our children, particularly those from the most vulnerable and underserved communities.

Education, especially in its early stages, is not merely the transmission of information but the careful nurturing of critical thinking, creativity, and a love for learning. Reading, the bedrock upon which all other learning is built, requires instructors who are not only proficient in the subject matter but also skilled in pedagogical strategies tailored to the diverse needs of young learners. Licensed teachers have undergone rigorous training and certification processes to ensure they possess these very skills. To bypass this requirement is to gamble with the future of our children, sacrificing quality on the altar of expediency.

Furthermore, this bill inadvertently perpetuates and exacerbates existing inequalities within our education system. Schools in affluent areas, with more resources at their disposal, will invariably continue to attract licensed professionals, while underfunded schools, often in marginalized communities, will be left with no choice but to employ unlicensed individuals. This creates a two-tiered education system that further widens the chasm of educational inequality, betraying the socialist principle of equity at the heart of public education.

I understand that the teacher shortage crisis is not a standalone issue but a symptom of systemic underfunding and undervaluing of public education. Instead of eroding standards, we should be investing in our educators—raising their salaries, improving

their working conditions, and providing them with the support they need to thrive professionally. We should be making the teaching profession more attractive to potential candidates, not diluting its standards to fill vacancies.

In conclusion, while the challenges facing our education system are real and pressing, the solution does not lie in compromising the quality of education. I urge you, as stewards of our state's future, to reject SB 1534 and instead focus on sustainable, equitable solutions that uplift our educators, support our students, and strengthen our communities. Let us not forsake our commitment to high-quality public education for all of Oregon's children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Devon Lawson-McCourt
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