

To: Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue  
Re: Support of HB

I am a former public school teacher and parent of two Beaverton Public School students. I believe I was a good teacher and, in most instances, our children received a good education. However, I believe that education is the responsibility of the student's parent (or legal guardian). If those parents or guardians feel the children are suffering educationally, alternatives should be available so they can rectify the situation. Elements of HB 4161 are a step in the right direction.

In a recent study, Oregon ranked 44th in the nation in terms of student achievement, 50th being the lowest. Clearly the state is not providing adequate options to students. This is an equity issue. Wealthy parents have the ability to seek out the best options for their students either through private schools, after paying taxes supporting public schools, or by selecting a place of residence that provides high quality education. It is also an issue of options for all parents. This bill takes steps to address both issues.

First, the bill requires school districts to participate in open enrollment which should open options for students. Districts may apply for a waiver under some circumstances. The waivers will be necessary in most cases. However, I have one concern about the bill as written in Section 4, Subsection 3:

The department shall grant a waiver if the department finds that the following have been satisfied:

“The enrollment of resident students in other school districts would compromise the level of support services provided by the school district to students remaining in the schools of the school district. The demonstration must include specific estimates of funding loss and details of loss to support services.”

I have often heard similar statements arguing against various options for school choice. How would students going elsewhere financially compromise the students remaining? The school district will no longer have the financial burden of the departing students. If the exodus of students is so large as to have such an impact, the State or the district should, instead, act to eliminate the causes of the exodus.

Second, the bill requires that the State establish education savings accounts (ESA) for students who are members of lower income families. As of a year ago, eleven states have education spending accounts, with a variety of restrictions, in addition to states offering other options for educational choice. This offers relief to students of lower income families trapped in suboptimal educational settings. Implementing ESAs in this fashion allows Oregon to test the concept of ESAs for some of our most vulnerable students. If it is successful, it should be expanded to benefit others.

I urge the committee to support HB 4161.

Thank you for your consideration.

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