

**Testimony Before the House Committee on Education
Regarding HB 4161
February 14, 2024**

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kathryn Hickok. I am Executive Vice President at Cascade Policy Institute, a nonpartisan, nonprofit public policy research organization based in Portland. Since 1991, Cascade has supported expanding education options for Oregon students. We also run a privately funded scholarship program for Oregon elementary children, the Children's Scholarship Fund-Oregon.

I write in support of House Bill 4161, which would increase education options for Oregon students.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and the school years that have followed it, many parents have tried new schools, resources, and education approaches for their families. In the process, many have discovered fresh perspectives on how their children learn best and what would support them successfully in the future. These experiences are motivating parents and students to seek more options in K-12 education.

Recent opinion polling consistently shows strong majorities of voters agree that parents should be able to choose among schools and resources they believe will best meet their children's academic and developmental needs.

Last year alone, eight states passed universal or near-universal educational choice laws. While individual states and localities have chosen different policy approaches, their goal is the same: to empower parents to match their students with schools, resources, and related assistance that are the best options for them.

Approximately 20 million American children are currently eligible to participate in a private choice program. Millions more attend charter schools or benefit from other kinds of public school choice.

This bill presents three ways Oregon can give students greater access to effective and motivating educational environments:

1. Raising the cap on charter school enrollment would allow successful charter schools to grow in response to student demand.



2. Expanding public school transfer policies would make it easier for students to attend other public schools that are a better fit for them, where seats are available. This would create incentives for schools to respond to families' needs and concerns and reward district schools that achieve better outcomes.
3. Enacting an Education Savings Account (ESA) program would allow per-pupil funding to be converted to portable accounts for students who choose to opt into the program. In Oregon, state-level education funding is allocated per child and received by district schools, regardless of student outcomes or parent satisfaction. An ESA program would help students attend the schools where they learn best. Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Utah, and West Virginia have universal Education Savings Account programs.

State education policies should value all options that empower students to achieve academic proficiency and reach their personal best. Students will be served well by increasing the options available to meet their learning needs, goals, and personal circumstances.

I urge you to support HB 4161. Thank you.