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Andrea Castañeda, Superintendent

February 16, 2024

Dear members of the Ways and Means Sub-Committee on Capital Construction,

I am very grateful to all of you for your service to our community. I appreciated the opportunity to speak at the public hearing today, along with my colleague, Luke Emmanuel. We had prepared a 3-minute presentation, so the two-minute timer caught us by surprise. I apologize for the incomplete presentation and am grateful for the opportunity to follow up by sending you written testimony and a more thorough explanation.

I am writing in support of HB 5201 and specifically in support of the Salem softball and baseball turf project at Willamette University. I support this project because of the significant impact that this expenditure would have on the youth and the families in the Salem area.

Willamette University has indicated that if state funding is made available for this project, the greater community will have access to their fields, both during Willamette's season and in the off-season. Specifically, this partnership would be key for the Salem-Keizer School District, as we currently do not own any, nor have access to any, turf softball fields nor baseball fields, nor are there any funds dedicated for this purpose in the foreseeable future due to our district's budget situation. Having free access to Willamette's baseball and softball fields would give our teams the ability to practice on actual ballfields during rainy weather, play their games in town, keep student-athletes in class rather than on the road and give families the chance to watch their daughters and sons play after work.

Natural grass ballfields are simply unplayable in Oregon for much of the season. While many of the players in the state are practicing on their turf fields, our kids are practicing in gyms, with coaches striving to create some semblance of real softball and baseball fields on the hard courts to simulate an actual playing situation, in hopes that student-athletes can develop their skills and be prepared to compete. Yet, despite coaches' best efforts, our kids typically have not even practiced on an actual softball or baseball field prior to their first competition.

Currently, there are numerous costs of not having turf fields, some tangible and some non-tangible. A cost that may not be considered because it is difficult to quantify is that of lost class time. As a lifelong educator, I would be remiss if I did not mention this concern. Because our local fields are saturated, Salem-Keizer's teams must play most of their non-conference games at their competitors' schools. In order to do so, we must get the players out of class early for these games, resulting in missed academic lessons. Additional costs are incurred when we need to hire a substitute for the coach, leading to non-athletes being academically impacted. Another cost includes renting a charter bus because the game has had to be re-located due to the weather, a last-minute change to the schedule that our school buses were

not able to cover. Often, canceling all sub-varsity games must occur because there are simply no fields on which to play, leading to the cost of missed developmental opportunities for our younger players. Finally, there is the unknown cost and anguish of parents and guardians simply not having the resources to travel to watch their daughters and sons play.

Imagine those costs being minimized if not eliminated because of this project, making an existing resource, centrally located in our capital city, more accessible and more beneficial to our community.

I recognize that you have demands everywhere and face difficult decisions. As a fellow public servant, I am grateful to all of you for what you do and for listening to my plea. Providing financial assistance to this project would indicate your support of our youth and fill a major gap in Salem. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lara Tiffin', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Lara Tiffin  
Coordinator of Athletics and Activities  
Salem-Keizer Public Schools