

House Committee on Education  
Oregon State Senate  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support for House Bill 3444

Dear Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Meg Elston, and I am the Executive Director and Principal of Three Rivers Charter School, where I have been for 15 years. I began my journey here in 2010 as a teacher and have remained ever since. Three Rivers serves students in grades 4-8, with an enrollment of up to 110 students. Every year, we have a waiting list of 80-100 families for only 30-35 spaces. Our charter school is a long-standing, viable option in the district and would be enhanced with further funding.

Our school began as an alternative program within West Linn High School, but when the high school underwent renovations, we lost our space. This led us to establish Three Rivers Charter School as its own entity. Founded in 2001, we are one of the few charter schools in Oregon that have been around since those early days. In 2017, we were fortunate to purchase our own building, which provided much-needed space but also brought significant mortgage and maintenance costs. Through negotiations with the West Linn-Wilsonville School District, we receive 90% of the district's charter school funding rate—a higher percentage than many charter schools, yet still not enough to fully meet our needs.

At Three Rivers, we offer a unique and engaging learning environment for students who thrive in alternative education settings. Every day, I see kids finding a place where they truly belong. We strive to foster a dynamic and evolving approach to teaching. Over the years, I have watched class after class of students flourish in our model, benefiting from the small-school environment that makes our community feel like a family.

However, despite our success, we face significant barriers due to inadequate funding. We are forced to ask for community donations—without this support, we would struggle to stay afloat. Additionally, we lack essential resources like a functional kitchen and transportation services—barriers that disproportionately impact low-income families.

As someone who believes equity must be at the core of education, I am deeply disheartened that charter school students in Oregon receive only 48 cents on the dollar compared to their peers in traditional public schools. The Oregon Department of Education champions equity in education, so why is funding not equitable? Alternative educational models are essential to serving students with diverse learning needs, and charter schools help bridge that gap. These students—like all students in Oregon—deserve better.

Please support House Bill 3444 to ensure that public charter schools receive fair and adequate funding.