

RE: State School Fund Bill SB 5516

Dear Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding State Bill 5516's proposed budget and its consequences for education in our state. This bill will lead to continued underfunding of Oregon's public education system—an issue that is already harming Oregonian children and our future as a state.

After a \$500 million dollar cut in funding in the 2023-2025 biennium, maintained in SB5516, districts are already spending more per student due to challenges driven by underfunding, and as a result have limited flexibility to invest in interventions that could improve student outcomes.

The effects of underfunding are real and measurable: student enrollment has steadily decreased, and absenteeism is on the rise. Families of means are compelled to leave the public school system, exacerbating the funding challenge in a per capita system.

I ask each of you– did you go to public school? Did your children? I attended public school myself, and I am proud to send my children to public school. As a someone who has attended and whose children do or will attend public school, this is our reality in Oregon's status quo:

- At our elementary school, enrollment has decreased significantly. Our class sizes have increased. Teachers are being asked to teach across multiple grades. Multiple grades are being combined in one “blended” classroom to further reduce teacher FTE, possibly impairing preparation for the transition to middle school for 5th graders. Positions have been removed from our dual language immersion program.
- In our school system, summer reading programs to support those who are behind on educational outcomes have been sharply curtailed and are only available to a very small subset of schools. Students who need support will not receive it.
- Across the state, school systems cannot meet increasing cost demands due to inflation and cost of living increases in addition to increased cost per student re: absenteeism and attrition as above. As a result, there are teacher strikes in multiple districts.
- Across the state, working families scramble for child care coverage for scheduled early releases and extended teacher strikes, all driven by funding gap. Furthermore, we anticipate that we will need to fill gaps in the education provided in an underfunded state system.
- Some families (friends in rural Oregon) wonder how they will educate their children, and who will care for them, when schools are only open four days a week but work weeks are five days long.

- Neighborhood families in Portland (specific families I know) have moved out of Oregon or opted out of public school for more reliable and/or personally funded education. Our local sense of community and connection is being undermined by underfunded schools.

- Across the state, educators and administrators endure worsening work conditions.

- Across the state, we receive a tax kicker every other year despite receiving constant messaging that there “just isn’t enough money” available for education. The wealthiest Oregonians receive the largest kickers. I highlight this to say: there is money for education. We just need to use it.

From the ocean to the city to the mountains, Oregon schools are just **not** getting enough money to educate our children. The status quo is not sufficient.

Approving SB5516 unmodified is a short-sighted decision that will have long-lasting consequences for generations of Oregonians, with the greatest effect on historically marginalized populations including those experiencing generational poverty across the state.

You have the power to stop this historical cycle of underfunding. I urge you to consider the negative impact that State Bill 5516, as it is currently written, will have on our children and the current and future quality of life in our state. Please fully fund our schools per QEC recommendations.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Amy Hardy
Portland