

Submitter: Lawrence Robertson  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Thank you for coming to Mt. Hood Community College today to gather the input of Oregonians.

My name is Lawrence Robertson, I'm a 4th / 5th grade teacher in West Linn Wilsonville, and Oregon City resident, and have taught in Oregon for 14 years..

Last fall the governor's recommended budget allocated 11.3 billion for the State School Education Fund, which at the time people thought was a solid, even strong investment in education. Today Chair Lieber referred to this as a CSL budget, and made clear that the Ways and Means Committee has made no cuts of any sort.

But in the last three months, many districts have announced budget cuts to deal with rising costs and the unfunded PERS mandate:

PPS - 40 million this year

Beaverton - 30 million

Eugene - 25 million

West Linn - Wilsonville - 15 million

Lake Oswego - 12 million

Gresham Barlow - 7-11 million

11.3 billion, though well-intentioned, is NOT a Current Service Level budget for many districts, not by any common understand of the word "Current." I'm aware that whatever DAS calculates as the CSL is the CSL, but last week 75 teachers in my school district, about 15% of our teacher workforce, found out they will not have a job next year. Class sizes at my grade level will grow from 22-24 students pre-pandemic, to 32-34 next year. That is NOT maintaining anything. And we are not alone. Portland Public has projected cuts of 200-230 staff members. And the list of staff cuts will grow significantly over the next three months.

I know that 75 teachers is just a number to you, so let me tell you what it actually means on the ground. Last week a student got highly escalated, and it was all 3 teachers could do to keep that student and others safe. Afterwards when the teachers were tending their bruises and scratches, they looked at each other and realized that 2 of the 3 won't have positions at our school next year. Next year for that same situation we might well need to call the police, because we will not have the staffing to deal with it.

So, I would ask you to understand:

- The recommended budget is a cuts budget, for some district a catastrophic cuts budget; it is far from a Current Service Level Budget, if that means maintaining the level of service we have been able to provide over the last biennium.

- I agree with Governor Kotek that we need accountability for better outcomes for Oregon schools, but this budget sends us in the opposite direction, and will leave us with much larger classes, less support for struggling readers, less support for behavior, and worse outcomes.

A final request to you and all our lawmakers in Salem: If at the end of things, you do your best and education still only gets around 11.3 billion, please have the honesty to call it what it is: a significant REDUCTION in service level. Do not call it a strong investment in education or anything like that.

One of the worst things that can happen in a classroom is when a student has a mental health crisis and starts being unsafe, like throwing chairs, but no one in the office picks up the phone because they are dealing with some other crisis. The only thing worse is to have that happen, then have to listen to lawmakers talk about how schools have plenty of money, we just have to use it better. Nothing makes teachers feel less seen or less valued or less respected. Nothing.

Have the basic respect for those of us who give everything we can to Oregon's children to be honest with us.

Thank you for your time.