

Submitter: Chalene Raymond
On Behalf Of: Madras Education Association
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

I'm a proud educator at the Warm Springs K–8 Academy, a school that primarily serves students of Native American descent.

I'm writing this testimony today to advocate for something that impacts every one of us — funding for our schools. Schools are not just places of learning — they are the foundation of a functioning, thriving society. Every profession, every innovation, and every leader starts in a classroom. But without the proper resources, our schools can't provide the opportunities our students deserve. Investing in education isn't just an expense — it's one of the smartest investments we can make in our collective future.

Yet for too many schools — especially those in rural areas — the resources just aren't there. These schools are often hours away from basic supports and services. Travel alone becomes a budget challenge — whether it's getting to competitions, accessing specialists, or giving students the chance to experience the world beyond their community.

Beyond academics, schools are often the only place where children receive consistent meals, warm clothing, emotional support, and even the chance to believe in themselves. That kind of care takes people — and people need to be paid. When we limit funding, we cut into the very heart of what helps kids succeed — not just in school, but in life.

Today in Oregon, our schools serve over 547,000 students — and 41% of them are students of color. About 16% receive special education services. These aren't just numbers — they're children, each with unique needs and incredible potential. But the average student-teacher ratio is now 17.3 to 1, and in many rural areas like mine, it's even higher. Teachers are overworked and overwhelmed, and the support of educational assistants — who are vital to student success — is in short supply or missing altogether.

At Warm Springs, like many rural schools, our building is more than a place to learn — it's where students access meals, coats in winter, counseling services, and even laundry. Statewide data confirms what we see every day: a significant portion of students rely on school-based services for their most basic needs — not as a backup, but as their primary support.

We cannot expect students to thrive when the adults guiding them are overwhelmed,

under-supported, and underpaid.

Investing in education isn't optional — it's essential. When we fund our schools properly, we don't just help students — we strengthen families, communities, and the future of Oregon.