

February 4, 2026

Co-chairs Lieber and Sanchez, Co-vice chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and Members of the committee, My name is Katharine Iliyn, but thousands of 6th graders know me as Wombat. I represent Cascade School District 5's Outdoor School Program and am here in support of HB 4112 and no further cuts to Outdoor School.

You do not know me, but I know that you stand for the future of this great state. Oregon is proud to have its great outdoors. We tell our kids to respect nature, to learn from the earth and to leave camp better than how we found it. In Oregon we don't just preach these things, we teach these things. You probably went to Outdoor School when you were young, as it has been a part of Oregon education for more than 60 years. Cascade's school district has been doing ODS for over 55 years. It's ingrained in our community's DNA. It's a rite of passage or a milestone for our kids.

I have been a part of Outdoor School for 17 years and this will be my 10th year as the director. Much like the Chuck E. Cheese slogan, Outdoor School is a place "where a kid can be a kid". There is no rush to grow up. There is singing, dancing, friendships being made, and memories they will share for decades to come. Every year we teach our students how to fish, to build a fire or a shelter, to make a trap, and to forage for edible plants. These survival skills are met with life skills. Whether it is building relationships, learning to ask questions, improvising and creating a skit, or even gathering around a table and having a good old fashioned meal, students are learning through doing. I see it. Outdoor school is also a place to learn about the world around us, outside of the classroom. This is unique to Oregon, but it really should be a part of every state. It is a privilege to live here, work here, and serve here. I will continue to direct ODS for as long as I am able. It is my passion and what I refer to as "my first child".

With the recent cuts to Outdoor School, we have suffered a significant loss of funding, (funding that Oregonians voted for in Measure 99); all Outdoor School programs have suffered this loss. Cascade's program is large and robust. We have around 200 students every year for a 4 day camp. Each day is 12 hours long; it is full of fun, it is rich with learning, it is comprehensive in

nature. This year, our program alone is trying to come up with around 20,000 dollars for our camp alone. I know that each and every ODS program in our state is feeling this cut in the same way. With smaller schools and newer programs, it will be even harder for them to provide outdoor school for all, which is what Measure 99 was created for and did for us.

I am reaching out to you because our funding for ODS has been cut by 20% and I was told you could help.

I will be bold to challenge these cuts and ask: Who is suffering? Who is impacted? The answer is the children in our state. I will even be bolder and say that I know that the money is there and I urge those who hold the power to give it back to the kids. I will defend that every Oregonian gets the privilege, dare I say **the right** to an amazing camp experience learning about the outdoors. Providing this experience to them each year is of utmost importance to me. I am not sure what I will do without 20,000 dollars, as I am just a camp director doing my job to make sure all students get the camp experience. I am not sure what other programs will do with such significant cuts. But I know that 6 million dollars needs to be restored to ODS across our state.

Will you help Oregon's youth continue to learn about life? There is so much to learn outside of the classroom. ODS is a milestone for each of our kids at Cascade and I know there are many more schools out there who feel the same. It needs to be protected at all costs. With funding reduced, the impact is **great**. These cuts affect our kids the most and that shouldn't sit well with any of you...

Will you help us fight for Outdoor School? Will you help us fight for the kids? Will you help us fight for this great state of Oregon? Please. Help us.

Kindly,

*Katharine Illyn* AKA Wombat