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TO: Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Chris Shank, SchoolWorks Attorney, chris.s@youthrightsjustice.org
RE: **Oppose SB 1572**
DATE: February 9, 2026

Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ) is a nonprofit public defense law firm with more than 50 years of experience representing children, youth, and parents in juvenile delinquency and dependency cases at both trial and appellate levels. Each year, YRJ delivers holistic, client-centered legal representation to hundreds of individuals involved in Oregon's juvenile court system.

YRJ created our SchoolWorks program more than 20 years ago after seeing—through our juvenile court representation of children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems—that our clients were facing significant systemic barriers to school success, resulting in consistently poor educational outcomes. Since its creation, our SchoolWorks program has provided individual education advocacy in over 3800 cases to help our clients enroll in school, stay in school, succeed, and graduate.

YRJ opposes SB 1572 because it relies on exclusionary discipline and retention policies that research has consistently shown are not only ineffective, but in fact, cause harm—particularly for students with disabilities, students of color, students from low-income families, and students experiencing trauma.

In addition, there are several federal laws that protect students with disabilities. Some of the provisions of SB 1572 would conflict with protections mandated under federal law. We would urge the committee to consider those provisions carefully.

First, SB 1572's discipline provisions move Oregon backward.

SB 1572 puts in statute a teacher's ability to remove students from the classroom for broadly defined "interference" and allows students to be excluded until a teacher provides written consent for return. This would be a profound message to students that they are not welcome in the classroom.

Research is clear: increased classroom removal and exclusionary discipline do not improve behavior or learning outcomes. Instead, they increase disengagement, academic failure, and

dropout risk. Oregon has spent years working to reduce exactly these practices because of their disproportionate impact on marginalized students. SB 1572 undermines that progress and instead encourages chronic absenteeism and reinforces the school to prison pipeline. Schools that have embraced positive behavior practices have seen classroom engagement improve without excluding students.

Second, reinstating the Essential Skills requirements creates new barriers to graduation.

Oregon is finally making some headway in increasing graduation rates, after long being one of the lowest in the country. SB 1572 proposes to reinstate high-stakes Essential Learning Skills proficiency as a condition for receiving a high school diploma or modified diploma which will negatively impact those recent gains. Oregon needs to continue on the positive trend of increasing graduation rates, with a closer focus on students experiencing poverty, justice system involved students, students in the foster care system, students with disabilities and students of color.

This year's graduating class is the first class to have all four years of in person learning for high school, post pandemic. These students still missed crucial learning opportunities in middle school due to remote learning. Our students deserve more time to recover from the impact of the pandemic before additional graduation requirements are imposed.

Third, mandatory retention based on third grade reading benchmarks punishes students.

YRJ understands and agrees that meeting third-grade reading benchmarks is critical to a child's success in school. We applaud the bill's proposal for high-dosage tutoring instruction, provided funding is allocated for this purpose. However, mandatory retention of students, as proposed by SB 1572, has several potential downsides. There is limited, contradictory research on the impacts retention has on students behaviorally and socially.

Effective literacy principles requires evidence-based, targeted intervention by high qualified reading specialists. Investing in summer learning programs for early elementary students who are below grade level in math and reading has been shown to be an effective intervention.¹ We would advocate that the committee consider additional supports for students struggling to meet benchmarks, rather than punishing the children by removing them from their same age friends and classmates.

Conclusion

Oregon's students deserve policies that support learning, connection, and growth—not exclusion, retention, and denial of diplomas. SB 1572 emphasizes control over care and punishment over support. For these reasons, YRJ urges the committee to oppose SB 1572.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
