

Testimony in Opposition of:

HB 2516: Relating to the costs of promotional materials for public schools; creating new provisions; and amending ORS 339.122

Submitted by:

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Dear Representative DOHERTY, Representative SALINAS, and members of the House Committee on Education:

My name is Melissa Steele, and I am the parent of a student at Oregon Connections Academy. My daughter, Carlie, is a Sophomore, and is also the National Student Spokesperson for Connections Academy. We regret we cannot attend personally to provide our testimony opposing this bill, but hope you will consider this written testimony as sufficient.

Oregon Connections Academy, a public virtual school, provides an educational option to students of varying needs – from those needing a more accommodating, comfortable learning environment, to the students who may struggle in a traditional brick and mortar school setting, to advanced and highly motivated learners requiring an elevated pace, like my daughter, who also utilizes the flexibility of online learning to further promote her non-profit organization, Carlie’s Kindness Campaign.

Virtual Public School, or “online school” does not incur the same expenses as a traditional brick and mortar school. Worksheets, newsletters, report cards, and other documents, as well as many of the textbooks, are all provided electronically for the students and their families. Not only is this more cost efficient, but it is also a more environmentally friendly approach. In fact, as a former Paraprofessional Teaching Assistant in a Public school, I can attest that the paper use in a typical school setting is extremely wasteful and excessive. Virtual School essentially eliminates that waste and that cost on the Oregon taxpayers.

The modern path of online learning is filling a paramount need in education, and it is imperative that families, like mine, are aware of this opportunity and alternative to a cookie cutter system that, unfortunately, fails a significant number of students for various reasons. Oregon Connections Academy boasts a broad scope of options for their students, including my daughter’s CTE, AP and Honors courses, dual credit learning, electives, extracurricular activities, as well as individualized education plans for those who may need extra assistance.

Public awareness of these options is crucial, and allows families to recognize that there are alternatives available.

Informative radio or television advertisements, or handouts at a Connections Information Session are extremely beneficial take-aways for families weighing their options. Gone are the days of attending a school solely based on your zip code, especially for the round hole/square peg students. Oregon Connections Academy recognizes that the adventure of learning is not a one size fits all scenario. Promoting new feats in education should be encouraged and applauded. Students across this great state are thriving because of this alternative, and had it not been for the ORCA commercial we saw almost two years ago, we would not be where we are today. The love of learning can be sparked in a variety of ways, and the beauty of Public Virtual School reaches kids whose spark had dimmed in a traditional learning environment. Exposure to this option is essential for families to make an informed decision about the possibilities available to their students. It has been a “game-changer” for Carlie, and we are grateful.

I urge you to oppose HB 2516, so that the children and families in our State can understand the educational options available to them, and not settle for a system designed for the masses. I appreciate the opportunity to share my experience, and sincerely hope you will take this into consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa K. Steele