

Members of the Human Services & Housing Committee:

I am writing to request that you pass SB543 out of committee so that the Oregon House of Representatives may vote on its passage.

As the Committee members are aware, SB543 authorizes the formation of children's service districts throughout Oregon. SB543 further authorizes such children's service districts to levy property taxes to fund programs that support children's total health and wellbeing outside of school hours.

Before moving to Oregon 18 years ago, I co-founded and ran a non-profit that delivered yearlong mentoring programs for at-risk middle school students. For 15 years, we struggled to raise sufficient money from individual donors and foundations to fund our work. When I moved to Oregon, I discovered that the non-profits here, also struggled to fully fund the many excellent programs they deliver throughout our great state. When a non-profit depends on donations and government contracts - they NEVER receive enough money to fulfill their missions on a consistent basis. Special Children's Service Districts could provide the stable and sustainable funding that could expand proven programs and serve more children and families.

I support the passage of SB543 for several reasons:

1. Children with access to programs outside of school hours are more likely to grow into successful, productive, well-adjusted adults and contributors to societal good. In many communities, however, such programs are (a) non-existent, (b) under-funded, (c) over-capacity, and/or (d) simply beyond the financial means of many parents. This is also true in Washington County.
2. Working parents whose children are in quality, affordable, and accessible out-of-school-time programs require less time off from work to get their children to and from programs. They are more productive at work when they don't have to scramble to find programs, balance schedules, and worry that their children are unsupervised for long periods of time.
3. Passage of SB543 would be an invaluable mechanism for local communities to provide sustainable funding for early childhood, after school, and summer programs that (a) prevent child abuse, (b) assure high quality early childhood programs, (c) offer nutritious meals outside the home, (d) provide opportunities to receive mentoring, and (e) support the success of all children—regardless of their financial means, culture, faith, or socioeconomic position.
4. Consistent and stable funding could allow the people who are employed by youth-serving non-profits to earn a living wage and benefits, like health insurance. This would solve the chronic retention problems that plague these organizations. This would offer employment stability and improve the quality of these already excellent programs.

I believe that passage of SB543 would be allow communities throughout Oregon to ensure that more children and their families get the opportunity to build a brighter future and escape the cycle of poverty.

I urge you to pass SB543 out of your committee and to vote for it when it goes before the full House.

Sincerely,

Susan Bender Phelps

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