

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chairs Noble and Sanchez, Representatives Helt, Meek, Mitchell, Schouten, Williams, and Zika:

I am writing today to urge you to vote “yes” on SB543.

As Mayor of Hillsboro from 2001-2009 and as Metro President from 2011-2019, I was actively involved in trying to recruit businesses to my city and region. We have been very successful over the years in creating, in Hillsboro, over 80,000 jobs that average \$109,000 per year in salary. With every recruitment the question of the quality of our education system came up. While Hillsboro enjoys some of the highest graduation rates in the state there still exists an achievement gap between students who are disadvantaged and those who have opportunities for enrichment experiences outside the school day. Unfortunately the students in the former category are becoming a larger percentage of the student population.

As the State of Oregon struggles to find enough resources for the K-12 system and the local communities are constitutionally limited in terms of how much support they can give to that system, the best way left to redress the imbalance is to put more public dollars into enrichment programs outside the normal school day.

Statistics show that the availability of enrichment programs before and after school, during the summer, and before the child reaches school age can have a profound impact on their ability to achieve at higher levels in school. These programs exist but unfortunately only about 8% of the qualified students are involved. To reach significantly higher numbers of children will require additional resources..Resources that currently don't exist at the local level and would stretch an already tight state budget more than it would bear.

SB543 would offer an alternative. By adding Children's Service Districts to the list of services for which a special district can be created. It would allow local citizens to petition for the creation of such a district and the vote it into existence. It would not be counted in the school portion of the property tax limit because none of the money would go for K-12 programs in the regular school day and therefore would not affect the school portion of the limit. The district could raise a significant amount of money with a relatively low tax rate and so the compression effect on other local governments would be limited. It just seems reasonable that this issue deserves at least as much attention as Tansy Ragwort Eradication or Vector Control, as important as those services are.

Thank you for your consideration and please support SB543.
Regards,
Tom Hughes