

Dear Chairman Dembrow,

I am writing to let you know that I strongly oppose SB 223. This bill not only makes me angry, but also truly disappointed in our state leaders. SB 223 is a significant threat to religious freedom and parental choice, by making private education subject to oversight by the state. The state has not shown the ability to manage public school education with the interest of each and every student in mind, but rather focusing on the number of students enrolled, and teaching only the bare minimum for state standards – teaching to the lowest capable student. Have you not seen how successful students graduating from private schools in the state are? Open your eyes.

I have found that my children's educational needs are best served by our private Christian school, Santiam Christian. My husband and I chose to enroll our boys in a faith-based, private education in order to not only be better equipped as future leaders in our community, state, nation and world, but to also learn who they are and what they are capable of doing. This occurs from participating in a challenging curriculum that explores all arguments and topics, which allows for a more well-rounded individual.

My boys not only excel in a very challenging education, but also participate in football, basketball, track & field, as well as the music and arts programs offered. These activities not only develop their brains but are engaging them in ways that help them learn about respect for others as well as utilizing a different part of their brain. Santiam Christian is currently a member of OSAA. Why would you even consider SB 223, which would take away so many opportunities for my boys, and the several hundred other students that would be significantly impacted by this bill? Shame on you.

In addition to the above, SB 223 will add expenses to all private schools that will have little, if any, benefit to the school or students served by them. Where does this money go? To the pockets of the state, to add to the total of mismanaged funds already in play? My husband and I have paid our Oregon taxes each year, including special school bonds for our local school district, and yet, our 15 and 13-year old's have NEVER stepped foot in a public school for education, or benefited from those taxes. We choose to make sacrifices every day in order to pay for the tuition needed for our boys to attend Santiam Christian, and we wouldn't change it for the world. To us, Santiam Christian is THE safest place for our boys to be. Not only are they receiving a top-notch education here, but are truly supported, encouraged, and poured into each day by the faculty and staff. This is something special that you cannot and will not find in a public school.

I am asking you to look beyond the political issues surrounding SB 223, and truly open your eyes to making the best decision for so many students and families in Oregon. STOP using our students as leverage for political gain – you are causing so much unnecessary harm to our children, and given the mental stress from the last year, this is not helping the situation. Why do state legislatures feel the need to overstep their jurisdiction and make SB 223 a real issue. It is unbelievable to think that in today's world, there are still folks out there that truly believe that parents are unable to make choices for their own children, but rather need to be told/directed on what is best by the state. Stay in your lane and do what is right; allow parents to continue to make choices for their children and leave our private schools alone. I urge you to vote NO on SB 223.

Sincerely,  
Jen Ragan