



March 19, 2021

To the Honorable House Education Committee Members:

I am writing to express the imperative nature for funding Forest Grove's *Oak Grove Academy* (OGA) long-term care and treatment program. Within the Hillsboro School District (HSD) boundaries, the Albertina Kerr organization has 4 residential facilities and 17 beds total. Albertina Kerr cares for our students who have endured the most difficult of life circumstances. These students experience developmental disabilities as well as severe mental health and extreme behavioral challenges that render them unsafe in typical school environments. The OGA program is the only possible place in Washington County to serve these students. Other treatment programs to which HSD has access rarely, if ever, accept students with co-occurring developmental and mental health needs. Funding through HB 3254 is crucial in order for HSD to be able to meet the needs of our most intensive students through the OGA program.

The OGA program is able to serve HSD students who are among the most challenging to serve in the state. The program has a unique and critical ability to serve students with co-occurring developmental disabilities and emotional/behavioral disabilities. It provides both quality academic instruction and mental health services to our students. Without this program, 17 of our most vulnerable students (residing in Albertina Kerr groups homes through the Department of Human Services developmental disability services) would struggle to access the high quality and specialized mental health and academic programming they desperately need. Additionally, students with such intensive needs would typically need to be in a treatment setting long term. However, due to the unique structure and service combination of the OGA program, it has been able to meet student Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and treatment plan goals, and has allowed our students to start their transition to their neighborhood school.

There are several examples of HSD students that have been treated successfully by OGA's life saving work and we would like to share one. Our student Perry P. (pseudonym used for confidentiality) came to us from the Salem area, was abusive to her sister and mother, and could not be left alone. Her mother tried everything to manage her behaviors and work with her, but Perry's unmet needs created a dangerous situation at home. She was injuring herself, others, and destroying property and not attending school. Perry was eventually placed in the DHS system. She entered OGA's "Gales Creek" site, and within six months, she was able to begin a gradual transition to her HSD middle school. She eventually made the full time transition to her HSD middle school two years ago and continues to be successful in high school.

Without the expertise of the OGA team and their partnership with HSD, Perry would not have made such progress and been able to participate safely in an inclusive, less restrictive environment that has placed her on the road to high school graduation. Many students like Perry in Oregon do not get the specialized support they need and languish for years in our state systems due to a lack of appropriate programming options. More importantly, these students are at risk of not being afforded the basic human right to access a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and specialized treatment in an environment that ultimately allows them to become contributing members of society. There is no other place in Washington County in which these precious students can receive the very specialized services they need. HSD needs long-term care and treatment funds to provide the highly specific services that students in our Albertina Kerr homes require. We implore the committee to consider passing HB 3254, which allocates crucial funding necessary to provide our students the safe, accessible education and treatment they require and deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Scott".

Mike Scott
Superintendent, Hillsboro School District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elaine K Fox".

Elaine Fox, Ed.D.
Executive Director of Student Services, Hillsboro School District

Engage and challenge all learners to ensure academic excellence

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