



2020-21

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OUR MISSION

To open doors to the worlds of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) for Oregon's youth by providing educational opportunities featuring robotics with special emphasis on maximizing the diversity of those participating.

ORTOP is a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit Oregon public charity, EIN# 46-4276182.

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I am David Perry, the Executive Director of the Oregon Robotics Tournament & Outreach Program. ORTOP has been implementing *FIRST* programs for 20 years in Oregon, reaching tens of thousands of students. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in regards to a small portion of Senate Bill 5513, the Oregon Department of Education's Grant in Aid Program. Over the past ten years, the Oregon Department of Education has supported school-based *FIRST* teams through a Grant-In-Aid program.

Legislative budget analysis has suggested the *FIRST* Grant-In-Aid program may be redundant with recent legislation such as High-School Success. It is true that districts have several options for funding programs such as *FIRST* in their budgets, and I commend this Committee on investments in CTE and STEM learning. However, I am here today to describe the value of maintaining the Grant-In-Aid program alongside these newer funding models.

The *FIRST* Grant-In-Aid program helps teams get started in underserved communities, often through the effort of a passionate teacher who volunteers to coach. Those early adopters bring awareness of the program to new communities and often lead to a continuum of programs stretching from K-12, with dozens of teachers and volunteers involved. Seeking funding at the district level makes perfect sense for these larger, more established programs, but is a tremendous barrier to the early adopters with no influence over biannual budgets. Losing this mechanism for responding to requests from smaller, newer programs will disproportionately impact the very communities we are trying hardest to reach.

Additionally, the Grant-In-Aid program has allowed ORTOP to conduct regular program evaluations to ensure we are having the desired impacts and reaching those who need us most. It also helps launch new programs that expand our reach, such as Unified Robotics that benefits students with special needs, or our current expansion into Early Childhood programs and teacher professional development.

In short, *FIRST* is exactly the program students need right now. It builds future-proof skills Oregon's students will need in careers that will increasingly rely on automation. It creates a sense of belonging for students and builds relationships with caring adult mentors. It provides clear pathways to college and careers. It has proven results and is scalable. ORTOP has a vision of every student in Oregon having access to this life-changing program. I urge you to maintain the *FIRST* Grant-InAid program at current service levels to help us reach that goal. On behalf of the thousands of students and volunteers who make up the *FIRST* Oregon community, thank you for your time and consideration.

David Perry
Executive Director