

Dear Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,

I would like to express my support for HB 2630 to provide five years of stable funding for school districts most impacted by the September wildfires. As an assistant superintendent of Phoenix-Talent Schools, I am grateful for the consideration by the Committee members and support of our state legislators.

On September 8, 2020 our lives were forever changed in our community, both professionally and personally. Nearly 80% of the children and staff in our school district were evacuated from their homes due to the Almeda Fire. Within a few days, as the smoke cleared and flames were extinguished, we had the grueling realization that nearly a third of our districts' students had permanently lost their homes. Our area had no power, no internet, and no television to keep citizens updated so I drove to the evacuation center and was astounded by how many of our Phoenix-Talent families were there; moreover I was amazed, although not surprised, at how many of our school personnel had also shown up to support our families.

Within days after the fire, Phoenix-Talent Schools had new "annexes" in White City, Central Point, Medford, and Ashland to support our families displaced by the fire. Every teacher and staff member called every student, even those teachers who were also displaced from the fire themselves. Since many of our families had lost their phones in the fire, our district team physically walked through the evacuation site and met with our students and their guardians. We distributed water and supplies, including hundreds of "dream" blankets to protect children from nightmares (this was one of the top requests from kids). I personally heard stories of bravery and compassion for neighbors; one young student beamed proudly as he told me how he had rescued his cat and his math book from the fire.

Our students are amazing and resilient. Today, hundreds of our students ride buses from hotels, RV parks and campgrounds, past the ruins of their homes and towns, in order to be with their friends and trusted staff members at school. We will forever be bonded by trauma and tragedy, but a stronger community from it. However, our school district needs stable funding to continue the level of service for our students, including Student Investment Account funds which currently pay for a full-time mental health provider at every school. Not having to worry about adequate funds to continue our staffing and programs will allow our administrators, teachers, and staff to focus on supporting our students and families.

The towns of Phoenix and Talent are diverse, supportive and friendly. It is a special place and our Phoenix-Talent School District is the hub of the community. Our families want to return as our towns rebuild; we need a strong school district to support their permanent return.

With Appreciation and Respect,

Tiffanie Lambert, Assistant Superintendent of Student Programs and Academics
Phoenix-Talent Schools