

Testimony

Oregon House Committee on General Government

SB 299 – Children's Service Districts

May 5, 2021

Participant for the record:

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Chair Wiley, Vice Chair Leif, Vice Chair Lively, Representative Valderrama, and Representative Zika:

My name is Michael Harper. As a member and on behalf of ReadyNation and Champions for America's Future, two organizations united under the non-profit Council For A Strong America, I am writing in support of SB 299 – *"The Children's Service Districts Bill."*

As a former professional athlete and an owner of a business, I know first hand the importance of out-of-school time programming and the lack of those resources. Investments at all levels of government – State, City and Counties - working together to create effective, evidence-based programs are each important contributions in reducing crime and improving students' behaviours, academic performance, employability and graduation rates.

Out-of-school time programming and resources play an essential role in connecting our youth to community. By creating a sense of place, encouraging safety, fostering connections, preventing juvenile crime and improving academic performance out-of-school programming set kids on track to successful and fulfilling lives. The current public health crisis has further illuminated the need to innovate and support access and availability.

Now more than ever, employers need workers who have specific practical skills as well as skills like problem-solving, effective communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. Honing their abilities in these concepts as part of mentoring and other out-of-school time programs helps pave the way for success in postsecondary education and the workplace.

I know that navigating conflict and working as a part of a team are as important as academic achievement. A meta-analysis of 68 afterschool programs connects the social and the academic support experiences to address the unique needs of each young person.

The key, in my opinion, is to be responsive to the needs of kids and communities. We must meet kids where they are and engage them in positive interactions. And we have to take that same mind set now as we evaluate the impacts of school schedule disruptions, social distancing, and keeping kids safe while continuing to support their healthy development.

Voters need to be able to decide where they believe the best place to spend their tax money is and I believe given the opportunity, they will choose kids and their future. That is why passage of SB 299 is so important. Communities should be able to decide. At present, many communities do not have that ability. I ask that you pass SB 299 and give the voters of Oregon the opportunity to provide the supports children and families need and want.

"Coming together for Our Youth: Innovating Out-of-School Time" – 7/22/2020 – Michael Harper, Panel Member
<https://www.strongnation.org/articles/1294-business-military-and-law-enforcement-leaders-highlight-power-of-out-of-school-time-programs>