



ROBERT A. WAGNER
SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

To: House Committee on General Government
From: Senator Rob Wagner
Date: Tuesday, May 4, 2021
Re: Support for SB 299A

Chair Wilde, Vice Chairs Leif and Lively, and members of the committee,

For the record, I'm Rob Wagner. I'm the State Senator for District 19, representing areas of the tri-counties - Lake Oswego, SW Portland, Tualatin, and West Linn.

I write today in strong support of Senate Bill 299A. This legislation changes current law to allow for the creation of children's special districts.

Testimony submitted to the Senate Finance and Revenue Committee made a compelling case for how Children's Special Districts could help our local communities. Some of the societal benefits of additional funding and programs for kids include: reduced crime, food security and nutrition, higher graduation rates, job preparation, and support for working parents. These benefits ripple beyond the children who participate. Parents, families, and the larger community all benefit.

This is a crucial equity issue. Across Oregon only 37% of low-income children have access to high quality preschool. If a local community wants to do better by supporting services, why wouldn't we let them serve their families and children better? No community must establish this type of district, but every community should have the opportunity to help its children succeed.

The opposition to this bill is rooted in hypotheticals about taxation rates and compression. But this bill is really about community choice. If the community doesn't want a special district for children, they won't vote for one.

The current list of special districts in Oregon law is illustrative for why voters should have the option to support children's special districts. ORS 198.010 allows for cemetery maintenance districts, highway lighting districts, vector control districts, weather modification districts, radio and data control districts and many more. If these issues are important enough to allow for special districts, surely our children's success is as well.

Last month, an incredible Oregonian, Beverly Cleary, passed away. While she is gone, her legacy and contributions to youth in Oregon and beyond remains. She once said, "If you don't see the book you want on the shelves, write it." Senator Riley has identified a gap in our laws and diligently worked to write legislation that gives our communities new options for voting to support their children. If we don't like the story we see unfolding for so many kids across the state, we need to write a different story.

I urge the committee's support for the bill.

Sincerely,

