

May 07, 2021

TO: Senate Education Committee
FR: David Parker, Superintendent of the Forest Grove School District
RE: Testimony in support of House Bill 3254

Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee, Good afternoon. My name is David Parker and I am the Superintendent of the Forest Grove School District. With me today is Cassie Kenney our Director of Behavioral Health and Wellness and the program creator of Oak Grove Academy. Also with me today is Allison Samuel who is the parent of one of our students.

We are here today to explain the context around HB 3254 and why we ask for your support. As you will see, this is imperative for our district.

Albertina Kerr Center (AKC) has ten residential sites in our area which have been funded through Long Term Care and Treatment (LTCT) funds since well before Forest Grove School District (FGSD) took over the contract from the Northwest Regional ESD in 2015. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) has funded and audited our site multiple times in the last 5 years. We have passed with high marks each time. Oak Grove Academy (OGA) is a quality program that has led AKC to move more intensive students into the attendance area and it opened up an additional group home in September 2019 (moving their most secure group home from Portland to Forest Grove). In particular, we have been able to serve these students in their own community, and transition many of our students back to their neighborhood school. In August 2019, we were informed that we would no longer be funded using LTCT funds based on a new interpretation of the funding statute defining Long Term Care and Treatment.

ODE's decision to fund, and then defund, our program after many years has created a complex situation. Forest Grove and Hillsboro now have a higher number of increasingly complex students to serve, and without remediation, will leave us with a large funding deficit.

You may be asking yourself why you should support this bill? This bill tries to right a wrong that is about to happen. Our school program meets an unique need in Oregon as it serves students with co-occurring mental health and developmental disabilities. Through LTCT funding, we have been able to grow our services into a successful program that has brought additional students with complex needs into the area. We cannot watch it be defunded because of a technical discrepancy in the current law. To withdraw funding at this point would leave Forest Grove, a district of only 5500 students, with a disproportionately high number of students with complex needs to serve.



The Forest Grove School District is expecting about 1.9 million dollars in the next biennium in LTCT funding, and if this bill doesn't pass, it will have a direct impact on not only the 47 LTCT students at Oak Grove Academy, but will have a direct impact on the approximately 5500 students in the Forest Grove School District. We would need to make cuts to cover this deficit, and we will still need to meet the needs of the OGA students. If we managed this deficit by cutting teachers, that would be about 16 Forest Grove School District teachers we would need to cut. In average numbers, this is an increase in class size of about two students for every classroom in our district. If we made the cuts in days it would be about 9 days of school.

HB 3254 continues years of funding for Oak Grove Academy so we can serve these students. AKC has opened up facilities in our district so the students can have their needs met at Oak Grove. These students have our heart. We want to help them be successful. Please help us to continue to serve them.



Dave Parker
Superintendent
Forest Grove School District
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