

Representative Susan McLain

House District 29



May 10, 2021

Senate Committee on Education

Re: Support for House Bill 3254

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you today because I believe that all students should have the opportunity to experience both tremendous academic *and* personal growth during their time in school. However, it is crucial that we recognize that in order to achieve both of these things, some students need more support than can be found in a traditional school setting.

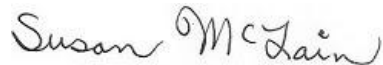
This is where programs like that at the Oak Grove Academy come in. The Oak Grove Academy provides a high quality educational experience to students, while simultaneously providing comprehensive crisis and preventative mental health care. This residential program serves students with co-occurring mental health and developmental disabilities. It offers a safe environment to students who may be unsafe in typical school environments. And the program serves students locally in their own communities and has transitioned many students back to their old neighborhood schools successfully.

This invaluable service now faces a loss of funding through no fault of its own. The loss of funding comes, not through any decision about the worth or merit of the program, but simply because of a change in the interpretation of the funding statute defining 'Long Term Care and Treatment'. That funding is needed to hire special education teachers, mental health specialists, and in order to provide high-quality academic support. Funding and then de-funding the program leaves our students stranded and the Forest Grove School District left with a large funding deficit. That deficit would have a wide-ranging impact on all students in Forest Grove.

HB 3254 passed the House unanimously but I want to thank Sen. Gelser for sharing some concerns about the language and structure of HB 3254. Since the bill passed the House, we have had a group of folks from ODE, DHS and the school district working on updated language that accomplishes the goals of HB 3254 without setting any kind of negative precedent or using language that is not reflective of the programs and students being served. I appreciate Sen. Gelser's collaboration and counsel on the language in the -3 amendment. It accomplishes our goals and we urge you to adopt the amendment and recognize the invaluable services these programs provide to vulnerable students and to vote to continue funding these programs so that children with co-occurring mental health and developmental disabilities get the help they need and deserve. Please pass House Bill 3254. Thank you.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan McLain".

Representative Susan McLain