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Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and members of the committee:

My name is Libra Forde. I am the Chair of the North Clackamas School District Board and I am a member of the OSBA Board of Directors. I am also the Chief Operations Officer for Self-Enhancement Inc., the comprehensive, one-stop resource for youth and families, primarily African Americans and others living in poverty or seeking culturally responsive services in the Portland metro-area. I ask you to oppose SB 580, which would mandate class-size bargaining in school district contract negotiations.

The Oregonian recently reported the effects of three years of class size bargaining in the Portland Public School system. In 2018, the Portland Association of Teachers bargained the inclusion of an “overage” payment structure into the PPS contract. Since that time millions of dollars have been spent on educator stipends for large class size. These stipends have, overwhelmingly, gone to educators teaching the historically best-served students. And there has been no general reduction in class sizes to speak of.

How is this kind of policy equitable? How is this what is best for our students of color, our students with special needs, our students that need the most support? We have evidence from the largest district in Oregon that that this kind of bargaining moves millions of dollars to teachers “overwhelmingly at schools with upper-middle-income parents.” How can you consider making this kind of policy into law?

I can assure you that this movement of money makes my work at SEI directly harder. At SEI we work with schools that serve some of the neediest students in the metro area. And every policy like this, that pushes money away from these schools to traditionally better-resourced schools, does harm. It moves potential supports away and makes it harder for these needy students to succeed.

As a school board member in North Clackamas, I am proud of our district’s recent success in improving outcomes for traditionally underserved students and students of color. And I can tell you that now, this year, this post-pandemic year, is not the year to add any new costs or barriers to coming back to school full-time. Every student I know of in North Clackamas is, in some way or another, suffering because of the effects of this pandemic. Students need the instruction.

They need interaction. And they need the community that schools provide. Anything that could even potentially get in the way of full return is bad policy.

I want to be clear that I hear what our teachers and staff members are saying. Classes are too big. There are not enough specialists available to do their crucial work. If that is the experience our staff describe in district, then that is good enough for me. But lowering class sizes means hiring more teachers and sometimes building more buildings. And until we have the funding to do that, being forced to bargain over policies that we know move money in ways that are against our equity goals is not something to support.

I encourage you to oppose SB 580 and am happy to answer any questions.