

Testimony of Debbie Thibodeaux
Oregon State Senate Committee on Education
February 24, 2022

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thomsen, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments in support of SB1552.

My name is Debbie Thibodeaux. I live in Senator Gorsek's Northeast Portland district. We had the pleasure of hosting Senator Gorsek in our home to observe a virtual school lesson demonstration with my daughters, Jordan and Michaela. That was back in June 2013 just after he was elected to the Oregon House. Since then, Jordan was graduated from a virtual charter school and is attending university. Michaela will graduate this year, a year early due to her virtual school's early college program. My son Zach, who was just 4 when the Senator visited is a 7th grader at a virtual charter school. I'm testifying today in support of SB1552 to remove the enrollment cap on virtual charter schools.

When our oldest daughter, Jordan, was ready to go to school, we investigated school options in our area. When we discovered virtual public education, we found it was a good blend of Jordan being able to learn at her own pace at home, while utilizing state-approved curriculum and working with a state-certified public school teacher. Once we experienced such success with Jordan, we chose to enroll Michaela and Zach in a virtual charter school, as well, and have found that all three of our children have thrived and done well in virtual school.

Families choose a virtual charter school for a variety of reasons. Virtual public education can be a valuable option for students who are looking for an alternative to the traditional classroom setting. However, policies like the 3% enrollment cap limit access to these schools for those who need it most. As a legislative body that states its commitment to equity, inclusion, and equal access in public education, continuing to impose an enrollment cap on virtual charter schools is not equitable, inclusive, or fair for the students who are seeking this option.

We were blessed that the enrollment cap was not a factor when we first enrolled our daughters. But with more families seeking a virtual school option, our district is currently one of dozens around the state denying students because they have hit the 3% cap. I believe that all families who seek this education option should be able to utilize it regardless of where they live. We owe it to our children to provide the best education possible, especially during these challenging times. Oregon families need to be able to choose the education option that works best for their family. Remove the enrollment cap on virtual charter schools so that more families have access to this critical education option.

Thank you.

Debbie Thibodeaux
Portland