

January 23rd 2023

OVSC Statement to the Senate Education Committee about SB531.

Ladies, Gentlemen and Others of the Senate education committee, My name is Bill OConnell and I serve as the executive director of Oregon Village Summer Camps. I have a prepared statement from the board of directors to read concerning Senate bill 531 and the extreme critical need for continuing public support for after-school and summer camp programs for people who are in early phases of their life. We are grateful to be joining our colleagues as we speak on behalf of those with little voices and no voting power.

The dangers that young people today must navigate are exponentially greater than the challenges of preceding generations. They are born into a dying world full of violence. A world where industry and corporate greed has pushed the climate faster and faster to a glacial minimum, creating an uncertain future where even fresh water to drink becomes a commodity. Having never lived in a world that has known peace more and more young people are turning to narcotics to cope. Fentanyl, heroin and meth are becoming a part of elementary school aged people's lives. School shootings and mass shootings involving people as young as six years old create a space where nothing but fear can exist. All of these things, warmongering and violence, oversexualization and social media, as well as manufactured scarcity and the shrinking monetary value of work are impeding the ability of our sons, daughters and children to grow and develop into adults that contribute to the growth and well being of our society.

As after school program directors and summer camp directors, we have a role in preventing the behaviors that result in addiction and violence. Haggerty and Shario, in their May 2013 article, 'Science-Based Prevention Through Communities That Care: A Model of Social Work Practice for Public Health' observed the (quote) enhancement of social and emotional competence has led to lower rates of drug abuse. Similarly, it has been observed by Fitzsimmons in their 1998 article, Violence and Aggression in Children and Youth, that (quote) Aggressive students often exhibit deficits in social information processing. Creating environments where young people develop social skills and grow meaningful relationships is exactly what summer camps offer. In another study conducted in 2016 by the Philliber Research Associates and the American Camp Association titled Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience found that the result of attending summer camps is that children self-report feeling more confident and independent as well as develop more social skills that help them make new friends. It isn't hard to see the connection between learning social skills and building resilience in children and reducing the chance that they grow into anything other than healthy and productive adults.

Many parents use summer camps to allow them to continue to work over summer when school is not in session. The demand in Oregon for summer programs to supplement the school year is

much more than the supply. Availability and high costs makes it harder for low income families to afford to give their kids the experiences that develop social intelligence. The costs associated in creating these experiences prices out the most vulnerable and at risk children in our communities. With the support from grant programs like the one being discussed in SB531 we are able to offset much of the cost for our campers. Additionally, committing to supporting our efforts over multiple years allows us to effectively plan how we will grow to continue meeting the increasing needs of our community. Providing support for summer camps and after school programs is one of many of the tools we know that works to curb violence and drug addiction in our community. There is not a single answer to the problems facing our society. There are however many tools that we may use to help people overcome their challenges and some of those tools are learned at summer camp.

On a more personal note, 2022 was our first year in operation. We are truly grateful to this grant for allowing us to establish our company. The first year was immensely rewarding working with the kids at our summer camp as we got to know some of the families in our community. Our camp is centered around a hike around Mt Talbert, where the children are exposed to and learn about natural science and the geological history of the mountain. We also have a lot of time to let the kids just talk. Sometimes I feel like we stumbled upon some kind of magic that helps kids open up about their feelings. We don't take lightly our duty to these kids to meet their emotional needs at this moment. I feel like the biggest help from this grant was to allow us to operate from a place of fiscal strength while reducing the costs of the camp to families. Thank you for your time and attention as this matter that we discuss today is life's purpose for many of us here.

References

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