

Submitter: Verelle Tomford
On Behalf Of: Lewis and Clark Montessori Charter School
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB767

I'm writing to oppose SB 767.

As someone that has several family members and friends that are public school teachers, I very much understand the importance and value of public schools, and the politics behind why this bill was written. However, I also understand that neighborhood public schools are not always capable of serving the needs of every child in their district, especially in large and diverse districts like Gresham-Barlow School District, and charter schools are often the ones that fill that gap.

For us, that school has been Lewis & Clark Montessori Charter School. We've only been attending this school since August, but our experience has been outstanding and our children are thriving. For our family and so many of the others we have met, this school meets our children where they're at, and has really helped them blossom. It is also the ONLY public option that allows my preschooler to attend the same school as my first grader, which as a family with two working parents, makes a world of difference for us.

I'm frustrated to hear that our school has been caught in the crosshairs of this bill. Lewis & Clark has been forced to relocate at the end of the year due to a lease termination by our sponsoring district, Gresham-Barlow School District. I know that leadership has made a massive effort to keep the new school location within the district boundaries, but this is no easy feat given the timeframe and parameters of finding a building to accommodate a PreK-8 program with almost 400 students and staff. The building that our school has found is less than 1,000 feet from the school district boundaries, and in a neighborhood that would make our school more accessible to underserved and more diverse populations.

I hope that you will consider our school when reviewing this bill. I am certain that there is a more creative solution for upholding the integrity of Oregon's public school system while also not taking away from a well-established charter school that is serving the needs of hundreds of families.