

Chair, Neron and Committee Members,

My name is Sami Al-Abdrabbuh and I hold a Ph.D. I have been serving as the Director of the Corvallis Board of Education since 2017. I am also the President-elect of the Oregon School Board Association and serve on the National School Board Association Board of Directors as a representative of the Pacific Region, which includes five states. From 2020 to 2022, I was the president of the Oregon School Board Members of Color Caucus, the largest caucus of elected officials of color in Oregon representing school board members. These affiliations are for identification purposes only and this statement represents only my personal views and not necessarily those of the organizations I represent.

Motivation

I want to express my gratitude for your consideration of this bill, which I support with proposed amendments. I have received feedback from many school board members, especially board members of color, regarding the financial burden of volunteering their time and fully engaging with their constituents. In my opinion, a stipend for school board members will level the playing field and allow current and prospective members to better serve their communities. There have been cases of school board members resigning due to increased housing costs, and I know individuals who would use the stipend to meet their basic needs or improve their physical safety.

Proposed Amendments

I strongly support immediate legislation to compensate school board members. I recommend passing [HB 2753](#), "Allows district school board to choose to provide directors with a monthly stipend," with the following proposed amendments for your consideration:

1. I support an amendment making the stipend available to all board members, with the option to waive it. I learned from the former mayor of Corvallis that they now have a waiver option for councilors, and this could be a model for school board members. The stipend could be considered taxable income and donated with the same rules as charitable organizations. Individual board members should have the option to waive the stipend.
2. I believe the language about paying for expenses or reimbursement of expenses should be clearer, allowing school board members to be reimbursed for approved expenses regardless of whether they receive a stipend. Many school board members engage in professional development and conference visits, and the stipend should not be drained by these expenses.
3. I recommend allowing school districts to provide healthcare insurance coverage to their school board members. Currently, school districts provide workers' compensation, but many potential board members have indicated that lack of healthcare is a barrier to serving.

Summary

In summary, I support providing a stipend to all school board members with the option to waive it. I recommend allowing districts to reimburse approved expenses for school board members, even if they receive a stipend. I also recommend considering providing healthcare insurance coverage for school board members.

Constituent Statement

Finally, I would like to share a statement from a constituent and community member who shared the challenges and barriers to public service. Her statement reflects the experiences of many community members across the state who would like to serve, but face financial burdens:

"I am seriously considering running for a school board member. I recently retired after 37 years as an educator. However, I am three years short of receiving medicare benefits and so I currently pay for medical and dental insurance. I pay approximately \$750 a month which is a pretty hefty payment on a limited income. If I were to serve as a school board member, I would have to resign from being a substitute teacher which currently supplements my PERS income with enough to pay for insurance.

As a retired person, the district will totally benefit from my services as I will have plenty of time to participate in building relationships with community and school personnel as well as focusing on student achievement and other board responsibilities. I understand there is a proposal for legislation to allow school districts to stipend board members. I believe this would be an extreme benefit that will promote the position itself but also allow people from all different economical status, myself included, to serve on school boards." - Chris Hawkins, Corvallis

Thank you for your kind consideration for this urgent matter given the increasing need to make it possible for all school board memberships to reflect the diversity of the communities which they represent.

Sincerely,

Sami Al-Abdrabbuh, Ph.D.

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* An electronic software was used to revise the document for coherence and grammar.

** Affiliations are for identifications purpose only.