



## **Bike Bus bill HB 3014 Support**

Date: February 20, 2023  
To: House Committee on Education  
From: Ashley Asbjornsen- Executive Director  
Sellwood Community House  
RE: Support for flexible school transportation funding, HB3014

Chair Neron, Vice-chairs Zach Hudson and Boomer Wright, and members of the committee:

My name is Ashley Asbjornsen, and I reside in Portland, Oregon. I'm the executive director at the Sellwood Community House. The Sellwood Community House (formerly the Sellwood Community Center). The Sellwood Community House is a 501(c)3 nonprofit community center serving patrons in SE Portland and beyond being a welcoming, inclusive and accessible space for people to learn, play, gather and connect. One of our pillar programs is our after school enrichment program that has been an institution and afterschool resource for families for over 50 years serving children from Duniway and Llewelyn PPS elementary schools. We serve 100 students and therefore 100 families to receive after school care. This directly impacts 100 working families a day knowing they have care until 6pm for their students. Financial accessibility is paramount to our program and 30% of our students receive free or reduced rates for after school care that far exceeds financial assistance most on site school programs offer. Statistically 72% of our students on a full scholarship are from a single parent household of those 65% are single mothers.

The driver related bus shortage had a huge impact on accessing reliable transportation for our students each day. Historically PPS transportation would transport the students and the Community House as our building was a bus stop. Without reliable bus transportation oftentimes we were notified only 1 hour or less that the bus would not be available. Without quick and creative problem solving on my staff's part collectively 100 children would be left at school without transportation to their afterschool program resulting in 100 working families needing to make quick and many times unsuccessful or unattainable plans to leave work on a moment's notice to pick their children up from school. This impact if it was left unaddressed would have been crippling to many families' livelihood.

When it became apparent that the driver related bus shortage was not going to be a quick fix, our organization reached out to alternative transportation advocates to seek guidance and support in thinking to create a sustainable and scalable solution. This solution was a simpler solution than addressing how to recruit and train more drivers. We had a problem and needed a solution- the solution was simple and we were ready to be part of the solution. We needed to think beyond the myopic view of the yellow school bus. We had families and students relying on safe and reliable transportation to after school programs and therefore began the walking school bus.

Creating a plan for implementing and executing the walking school bus program had a cost. We now needed to pay staff additional hours to lead the walking school bus and purchase supplies for safety equipment. As a small non-profit this was an expense that wasn't budgeted for but we are dedicated to supporting families and children and felt that if we could have a direct impact on families and students we were willing to make that happen.

With the news and social media saturated with news of children having no transportation to and from school and families in desperate need of this state funded service I was looking at our success story thinking, the solution is simple. We need to think simple. I reached out to the PPS Transportation director to empathize with the problem and share how our organization created and implemented a solution within 48 hours. I asked for financial support for our organization to make sure we could continue to offer this to our families. I was thanked for being a part of a solution but that funding was restricted and I should ask volunteers of the school to help with such a project.

Volunteers are gold but volunteers are not a sustainable and scalable solution to addressing transportation shortages. It was frustrating that the simple solution that we addressed and executed in 48 hours with our staff wasn't able to be a solution the district could financially support. The alternative would have been that every time the bus wasn't available 100 students would have been left at school. I am ready to be a part of the solution, let's dream up and learn from alternative transportation advocates around the state and the country. The time is now to get going- how will students be riding, walking and rolling to school and home from school in a few years? I dream of a solution that exudes joy for both students and adults and creates a sense of calm with reliable modes of transportation.

For these reasons. I urge your support for HB3014.

Thank you.

Sincerely, Ashley Asbjornsen

Executive Director- Sellwood Community House