

Thank you Committee chair for hosting this hearing today.

I am Coach Sam Balto, a Physical education teacher and walking school bus and bike bus specialist, and currently the leader of the world famous Alameda Bike Bus. As an educator for over 12 years my lens has always been to put children's wellbeing first.

When I was introduced to the Safe Routes to School program 8 years ago it sounded like a great way to get students more opportunities to be physically active. I did my first walking school bus in Boston, Massachusetts and I still remember the joy of those students arriving at school that first time. I vividly remember my 4th grader Quadir banging on my gym door asking when we would do it again.

It touched something inside me as an educator and as a human. Up until that point I had witnessed 1000s of hours of chaos and disconnected school communities as a crossing guard, supporting parent pick up and drop off lines and bus duty, but not that morning.

Walking school bus and bike bus mornings are different. Our students arrive happier, more joyful and more excited to start the school day.

You may know that several months ago my school Alameda Elementary created a Bike Bus in which hundreds of students bike to school weekly. It is a phenomenal success. It started with 75 students and now has over 190 students who have participated which is over a 1/3rd of the student body. Students and families are overwhelmingly enthusiastic and students report a greater sense of togetherness, greater physical activity and well being and a stronger sense of self. Bike Bus videos have gone viral with 10s of millions of views and we were featured on NBC Nightly News.

The Alameda Bike Bus is a case study for the growth of these initiatives when they happen consistently. These types of alternative student transportation options currently rely on volunteers which is inequitable and unsustainable.

I can tell there is a tremendous unmet demand for alternative school transportation such as the bike bus. I have been involved with Safe Routes to School for over 8 years supporting school communities with active transportation choices to school. Without fail, walking or biking to school is the children's favorite way to get to school. Not only do they get to socialize, get fresh air, physical activity, they are having fun.

I am actively involved in the Safe Routes to School national movement and state leaders across the country see Oregon as a leader in creating more dynamic student transportation options.

I could tell you how our principal has said that students on bike bus mornings enter the school building calmer and quicker than on other mornings, I could tell how it is well researched that physical activity before school is good for the student's health and academic performance or I could tell you how walking and biking can build student's sense of autonomy, confidence and well being.

But besides the immense amount of benefits for students, what HB3014 does is it gives our school district leaders, superintendents, and school transportation departments the flexibility and tools to select the most effective form of student transportation to meet the needs of students and families that we serve.

As an educator in Oregon I am asking that you equip schools with the tools necessary to provide students safe, efficient, and nurturing options for transportation. Getting students into the classroom happy, engaged and ready to learn is step one for a successful school day.

Based on my experience as a teacher and advocate I am confident it will make a very positive impact on our school communities and students' lives.



