

March 1, 2023

To: House Committee on Education
From: Dionne Mejia, Student teacher
RE: Support for HB 3178, Teacher Scholars Program expansion

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Hudson and members of the committee—

My name is Dionné Mejía and I am a student teacher in Greater Albany Public Schools and I attend Oregon State University. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in front of you today to express my support for HB 3178, which will allow Oregon's Teacher Scholars Program a much needed expansion.

I am supportive of this bill because I am currently receiving this scholarship to go back to school and I believe that programs like this are a critical part of the state infrastructure to knock down barriers to becoming an educator.

The scholarship has certainly helped me because I would not have been able to afford to go back to school to become a teacher without it. I originally graduated college in 2016 with both bachelor's and master's degrees in biology. After college, I worked in several jobs and I learned that I was most passionate about science education because it allowed me to make a direct impact in the lives of young people. In 2021, I made the decision to return to school to obtain a teaching license with endorsements in integrated science, biology, English for speakers of other languages, and dual language education. Returning to school has been one of the toughest financial decisions that I have made in my life. I still owe over \$30,000 on student loans, so scholarships like this one have meant one less worry as I work to get my teaching license.

When I returned to school at Oregon State University, I had to reduce my work hours to part time. Receiving the Oregon Teacher Scholars Grant allowed me to quit my job and focus completely on school. This year during student teaching I have been unable to work because I spend every morning in my internship and the afternoons taking classes at OSU. The Teacher Scholars Program matters to me personally because I think it's important for students to have role models with similar backgrounds to their own. I have seen in my student teaching placement that there is a tremendous need for bilingual educators in particular.

According to a 2022 report release from the Educator Advancement Council, even though the number of teacher, principal and administrator candidates enrolling in Oregon's preparation programs increases, we see a decrease in program completion overall. The report cites that with each milestone towards employment in education, fewer and fewer diverse candidates are present and completing the program— many who do not complete their teacher prep programs say tuition and increasing costs are a barrier. That's why the Teacher Scholars Program is so important.

In addition, we know that the 2022 awards were maxed out, meeting the need of many who see tuition as a barrier for their path to the profession. If we want to meet the challenges of the workforce shortage we have today, we must fully utilize the tools we have for recruitment, like tuition remittance programs, and expand on the idea so we don't leave a single student behind.

In the midst of a workforce crisis, this is a forward-looking solution that centers the bridge between what allows our inspired students in the classroom to envision a path to becoming a future educator and a direct benefit to our incoming workforce.

I encourage the committee to support HB 3178. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dionné Mejía
Student Teacher