

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee:

My name is Tami Darden, and I work for a non-profit organization based in Eugene, OR that for the past 13 years has worked to integrate climate and sustainability education and actions into Oregon schools. Simply put, my job exists specifically because of a lack of comprehensive climate-based education in our state. Today, I'm urging you to make my job less necessary, and support SB-854 in becoming law.

I have partnered with dozens of teachers through the last decade and know that many of them would like to be able to better integrate these issues into their curriculum, but they lack the resources, training, and support they need to do so. This bill paves a way to give teachers the tools they need to make learning about climate change part of the fabric of Oregon students' educational experiences.

The most frequently heard criticism I have come across in opposition to this bill is that it places a hardship on already overworked teachers, but I believe this bill, which was developed by educators and students themselves, has taken into account how to make this transition in a way that supports teachers and schools. I believe that as students learn about the issues throughout their entire educational experience, and how it impacts their lives and communities, they are better equipped to start to thinking about how they can be part of the solutions we need to be working towards.

In the statewide high school climate leadership network that I manage, I've heard from many students about their dissatisfaction with the lack of consistency in who learns about this issue and who doesn't in their schools. Some of our students are lucky enough to take an environmental science class that chooses to teach climate science, for example; but even those students may not be learning anything about the nuances and complexities of this issue that have both local and global implications that reach far beyond understanding the science.

I believe that the student testimonies submitted will confirm that students believe improvements need to be made in the way we educate about the climate crisis in our schools. In order to be optimistic about their future, they need the tools and knowledge to empower themselves to be part of the solutions.

It is for all of these reasons that I urge you to see the potential of this bill to create a pathway for our educational system to meet the challenges we face in an integrated and holistic way. With passage of this bill, Oregon can be a pioneer in creative and innovative educational solutions other states can use as a model. Thank you for listening, and for giving careful consideration to supporting this bill.

Respectfully,

Tami Darden
Eugene, OR