

Submitter: Chelsea Prasad
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB854

Thank you Chair Wagner and members of the committee.

My name is Chelsea Prasad and I am a senior at Lake Oswego High School. I am here today testifying in support of SB 854, which would require each school district to develop a written plan establishing climate change instructional programs for K-12 grades by June 1, 2026.

As a student, I had never fully grasped the significance of climate change until I was in my junior year of high school. I took AP Environmental Science that year, which reformed many of the misconceptions I had formed about climate change and environmental activism. Before taking it, I had often heard news reports of the Amazon rainforest being cut down, plastic islands in the ocean, and problems that were imminent in the grand scheme of things but were pretty negligible to my daily life. As I started learning more about current environmental issues, however, my perspective shifted. I realized that everything, from the food we eat to the concrete that goes into our sidewalks, contributes to how we degrade our natural habitats and resources. I learned the solution to climate change was not to use straws or carry metal water bottles, but to change our consumption and pollution habits. Depending on the issue, that could mean a fundamental shift in the way we live, and we would have to maneuver around various political, economic, social and cultural barriers hindering us from solving it. I never would have understood the complexity and breadth of the issue without that class, but still, many students graduate without ever taking it or being aware of any way they may be impacted by it.

SB 854 would ensure that everyone is able to fully understand the depth of these problems and the systemic changes that are needed to solve them, shifting way from some of the surface-level solutions we generate today. At the very least, every student will have access to education that teaches us that climate change is more than just a phrase, but a real, tangible challenge that we face every day. I recognize that implementing this bill may seem overwhelming to some, or that climate change should not be prioritized over other subjects, but it is not a debate over what is more important. Climate change can be used to learn the basic subjects of literature, math, science and history, and vice versa. We cannot prioritize one issue over another as an excuse to ignore or diminish the importance of climate change when the quality of our lives in the future is dependent on our ability to solve the issue effectively now.

I urge you to please listen to the voices of youth and prioritize access to equitable climate justice education in our public schools this session and beyond.