

SB 854 - An Opportunity for Bipartisan Education Support

Dear Senate Committee on Education: Chair Senator Michael Dembrow, Vice-Chair Senator Suzanne Weber, Senator Dick Anderson, Senator Lew Frederick, Senator Sarah Gelser Blouin, Senator Art Robinson and Senator Rob Wagner. Thank you for welcoming us to speak with you today.

Senate Bill 854 stands to offer a Bi-Partisan Education opportunity for future generations of Oregonians. My name is Sarah Ruggiero Kirby, and I have taught CTE Natural Resource Management for 12 years. During this time, I have consistently experienced un-politicized love and appreciation for our rivers, forests, farmlands and wild spaces. I had the opportunity to work with high school students who hunted, fished, farmed and explored the lands and waters of Oregon, and though their politics were very different from one another, they all came together around the importance of clean water, healthy forests, living soil, and a promising future around how to steward their beloved open spaces.

While climate change tends to be a divisive political topic, education around Oregon's changing landscape and natural resources is an opportunity for collaboration and partnership. There is no question that the economy, public health and communities of Oregon will be impacted, as outlined in the [Sixth Oregon Climate Assessment](#), released on January 4, 2023 by the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute. The economic impacts are already being felt in agriculture, forests and timber production, fisheries and recreation sectors. Public health and local healthcare systems will continue to be strained under extreme weather and heat-related conditions, wildfire smoke, and mental health impacts from traumatizing events like evacuations.

This does not need to be a polarizing, political issue, and our students will be the first ones to say so. Students are worried about how drought will affect their farming and ranching communities. Students are worried about how drought and megafires will impact their forested communities and forest economies. Students are worried about how warming, changing ocean conditions will impact their coastal communities and livelihoods. They express anxiety and hopelessness, and are seeking knowledge, answers or solutions to invest in their own futures. Students are wondering how to make a decent living in our rural communities, while the land and waters are changing so drastically around them. They are

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seeking careers that can make a difference, can redefine our local economies, and be environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

Encouraging and allowing students to explore, research and innovate solutions will lead to thriving future economies. They have the will to make a difference. Oregon's students will become the future leaders in sustainable economic development, with innovative technologies and policies that can lead to clean energy solutions, efficient building and community designs, local farming economies, micro-grid energy solutions, community solar projects, resilience hubs, and much more that they have yet to dream up. Many solutions exist, and many have yet to be innovated. Some are being debated and proposed in this legislative session. These are promising bi-partisan opportunities that students will need to learn about, in order to carry these solutions forward in our state.

This is an opportunity to collectively look for solutions across existing generations of Oregonians. Students demand the knowledge, skills and ability to create solutions that will encourage well-adapted, resilient and thriving communities in the face of drought, wildfires and changing ocean conditions. I implore you to vote for Senate Bill 854 on behalf of the young people, future steward and constituents in the state of Oregon.

Thank you so much for your time and for listening today to the voice of educators and students across the state.