



March 8, 2023

House Committee on Rules  
Oregon State Legislature  
RE: HCR 18

**Executive Director**  
Erin Esparza

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Dear Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the staff, the Board of Directors, and the community of Classroom Law Project students, teachers, and volunteers, I would like to tell you how honored we are to be considered for this recognition on the occasion of our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

As you are well aware, particularly with Oregon's highly participatory system of voter initiatives and referendums, it is especially crucial that Oregonians are well-prepared and well-informed to exercise their civic duty. The future of our state depends on whether or not the next generation is ready to – and motivated to – engage in informed and engaged democratic citizenship, and ultimately all of us living in Oregon benefit as our students become more knowledgeable citizens who understand the importance of civic participation, conflict resolution, and the democratic process.

When I joined Classroom Law Project almost 5 years ago, I felt like I had truly inherited a jewel as the organization was made up of a set of incredibly strong programs, with a truly dedicated staff and Board, and a wonderfully strong statewide group of volunteers and supporters. I quickly learned that there are two characteristics of our work that make it particularly powerful – that it provides students with active learning experiences, and that it incorporates direct community involvement.

Experiential approaches are critical because as one expert said “students cannot be expected to learn to be civically engaged simply by reading a textbook. They can only learn how to be civically engaged by practicing being civically engaged.” Simulations of democratic processes, such as mock trials and mock elections, require students to “try on” the roles that they will be asked to take as adults, learning to practice the skills necessary to effectively make their voices heard and collaborate with others.

Building in opportunities to engage with civic role models is also critical. The chance to observe and directly interact with members of the community from a range of backgrounds including attorneys, judges, legislators, civic and business leaders, educators, and others helps to provide students with a sense that they have a place in the society, and that they have both the right to be taken seriously and the responsibility to participate.

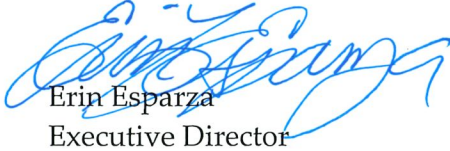
Over the years, Classroom Law Project's organization and impact have been made up of literally thousands of individuals coming together to make this possible, driven by a

Classroom Law Project is a non-profit organization of individuals, educators, lawyers, and civic leaders building strong communities by teaching students to become active citizens.

passionate belief in the mission of teaching and preserving our democracy and democratic ideals, and genuinely willing to dedicate their time and themselves to that – with nearly 1,200 teachers, 120,000 students, and 600 volunteers during the 2021-22 school year alone.

I ask that you vote yes on HRC 18 to honor the incredible community of Classroom Law Project and all of the time, passion, and dedication they have contributed to make Oregon itself a stronger community, a stronger state, and a stronger democracy over the last 40 years.

Sincerely,



Erin Esparza  
Executive Director





## CLASSROOM LAW PROJECT

# STUDENT VOICES

HOW OUR PROGRAMS IMPACT YOUNG OREGONIANS...  
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Support for democracy is decreasing among young people across the globe. We don't feel represented in government. We don't feel like our government is working for us. Civics education is a way to fix this. It will encourage young people to engage with our government instead of becoming disaffected with democracy. My civics education helped me understand we can make a difference in this country, that we can fight for a better tomorrow."



"With the help of Classroom Law Project I was able to... reflect deeply on what it means to be a citizen of our community. In learning about the Constitution, I developed a deeper appreciation of the country I live in. I am proud to be an example of someone who was changed for the better by CLP."

"CLP helped me to have a voice in the world as I connected with people who wanted the same things as I did, and listened to what I had to say. I felt empowered to know that like-minded people were there supporting me and making me a better person."



"The studying I did on the 14th Amendment last year drove home my desire for justice for all people. Classroom Law Project programs have instilled in me a devotion to my work and a desire for voice that I will carry with me the rest of my life."

"I think it's really important... we're not saving polar bears, but we're preparing people to be able to engage with their communities to save the polar bears. You're making an investment that's more far-reaching than just educating kids."



"I know I will use the lessons from Mock Trial and We the People about valuing different perspectives, working with people of diverse backgrounds and opinions, and having the confidence and assertiveness to not be silent in the face of ignorant malice."

"Mock Trial truly gave me a sense of belonging, and allowed me to open up and meet more classmates. The opportunity to enter into a community of students, and engage in energized, fierce debates, paired with enriched, analytical study of the cases, was something I will always be grateful for."

"For the first time, school was actually fun. The programs were the first taste I had of the legal world and profession. I realized some of my natural talents for argumentation could be put to use for a higher purpose."





## CLASSROOM LAW PROJECT

# STUDENT VOICES

### BOB & MARILYN RIDGLEY SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

#### ALAZAY SANDERS (2022)

*Alazay is a graduate of North Medford High School, where she participated in Mock Trial. A first generation college student, Alazay is studying Criminology and Communications at University of Portland.*

"Participating in Mock Trial has had a huge impact on me and my future. Growing up as a mixed African American and white student, I have witnessed racial discrimination all around me, and I want to work to make the justice system fair for all people. Things in my life started to click when I joined Mock Trial, and it showed me that I can achieve anything if I put my mind to it."



#### BUTCH NASSER (2021)

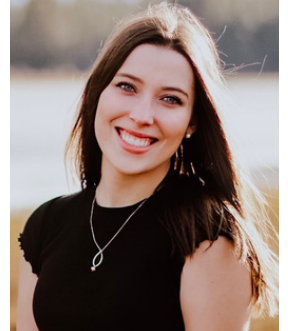
*Butch is a graduate of Southridge High School in Beaverton, where he participated in Mock Trial. Butch's studies at Stanford University focus on Electrical Engineering.*

"Working with attorneys and seeing how they speak and interact changed my perception of a career in law. Having a coach who treated me and my teammates like real attorneys, not talking down to us or simplifying things, has changed how I view lawyers, and myself. Even if I don't choose the path of becoming an attorney, the quick thinking and leadership skills I gained from Mock Trial are skills I can utilize anywhere to propel me toward a successful future . "

#### KEANA POWERS (2020)

*Keana, a graduate of Summit High School in Bend, participated in Mock Trial. She attends Oregon State University, where her studies focus on criminology and forensic science.*

"When a friend convinced me to join the Mock Trial team, it quickly became a passion and the experience has greatly changed me. My shift in confidence is the biggest difference. Leading an academic team and speaking in front of professionals and experienced judges made me feel truly powerful for the first time."



#### NADZEYA PAHODZINA (2019)

*Nadzeya, the daughter of Russian immigrants, participated in Mock Trial at Parkrose High School. She graduated from Portland State University in 2022, and is now studying at Lewis & Clark Law School.*

"As a kid, I always viewed justice as something I would never reach. Mock Trial changed my life. I know that may sound like something everyone says, but believe me when I say that it gave me the one thing I needed to secure my success and future. It gave me the power to seek justice."

#### PHUOCAN NGUYEN (2018)

*Phuocan is the son of Vietnamese immigrants, and is a first generation American citizen. He participated in We the People at Central Catholic High school, and graduated from University of Portland in 2022.*

"I understand that an individual's efforts can cause a lot of change... I want to build a society where future generations can build a stable life. The Constitution gave us a means for promoting better policy, and using what I've learned, I hope to influence legislation which promotes greater diversity in our nation."

