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Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

3/22/2023

Co-Chairs Senator Frederick and Representative McLain and members of the
Committee:

As the Program Director of our youth programs at Growing Gardens in Portland, OR,
and as an Oregonian, born and raised, who is dedicated to Oregon's youth, I am
submitting testimony to ask you to provide full funding for HB 5014 in the amount of
10.2 million dollars for the coming biennium.

In a moment I'll share what this funding has allowed Growing Gardens to provide our
community school partners, but first I am compelled to share how I've witnessed the
impact of this funding change tens of thousands of Oregon childrens' lives over the past
20 years.

I started what would become my career in education as a volunteer after school educator
at El Camino del Rio Elementary, then River Road Elementary, close to where I'd grown
up. There, I saw the undeniably positive impact of Farm to School education on the
students. School garden and food based education was hands-on, engaging, and fun.
Imagine yourself as a kid...that's what happened to me as I worked with the students. I
saw their lights turn on! Food was involved (yum)! Nature was involved...and fresh air
(ahhh!) and the chance to move your legs (yes)! And, you get to be there with your
friends having new adventures. It was the start of a recipe for successful learning.

Seeing the kids engaging so actively at River Road's school garden lit my own fire as a
young educator. If kids could get so excited about moving bark chips and making bird
feeders and planting a tomato plant, then couldn't we grown ups use this space to provide
learning opportunities that would stick for our kids in reading, writing, history, math and
science? Couldn't we use this space to provide our kids with the chance to learn to work
together toward something that really mattered like helping to bring life to a plant and a
garden space, and food to birds and bees? Why didn't all schools have these vibrant
learning spaces?

From this initial experience in 2002, I learned that the potential for these amazing
educational experiences existed but mostly in a sleeping state, like a seed...dormant.

What we were missing were the resources for that potential to grow and thrive...funds to

not only build the spaces but to train and retain amazing educators who have the time to help classroom teachers
use these spaces!



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Since that point, there have been many incredibly dedicated Oregonians (including so many of you!!!) who saw that same potential. They have worked tirelessly to grow these resources. The funding the State Legislature has provided over the past 10 years now has been absolutely a game changer. It's been instrumental in providing non-profits, schools and districts stable funding for their Farm to School efforts. This has offered us the ability to establish these learning spaces, as well as train and retain qualified educators to facilitate outdoor and food based learning experiences that are reflective of each school community for Oregon children in rural and urban areas alike.

This is my life's work and I'm so proud to be from a state that sees the value in this sort of learning. I'm so grateful to be able to stay in Oregon to invest in our kids in this way. Without this funding and the progress this funding has allowed, I would not be able to do this. More importantly, so many Oregon children would be missing out on these memorable learning moments, with an impact that can last a lifetime.

For Growing Gardens, where I direct our youth programming, we have a team of 13 amazing educators who work in a dozen amazing title one Portland area schools, Headstarts and kindergarten readiness programs, directly serving almost 3000 students and their families. We teach in the garden and classroom about food and science in culturally responsive ways, offer cafeteria tastings of Oregon grown produce, bring local food systems leaders in as guest speakers, provide take home cooking and gardening kits, and care for the school gardens alongside community members.

The grant funding Growing Gardens has had the honor to receive and put to good use through the Farm to School Bill over the past several years has had an incredibly stabilizing effect on our ability to operate, retain staff and provide the services we do.

Additionally, with Technical Assistance grant funds from this program, our staff is also able to offer free assistance to school communities around Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties who are also running school garden programs. Assistance takes the form of onsite and virtual consultations, distribution of garden education resources, information sharing, training and gatherings. This helps us support the broader mission of Farm to School in the state.

Thank you for your support of our kids and their families through providing this funding for Farm to School! Thank you for trusting those of us doing this work with taxpayer dollars. I'm incredibly proud of the work we are doing around the state to incorporate food and garden based learning into the daily lives of our kids.

All of us in the Farm to School movement see on the ground, daily, how this sort of education lights up the eyes, minds and hearts (and taste buds) of our kids for learning. It gets them excited about so many positive experiences with food and nature and one another that help them to thrive now and in the future. By funding this Bill fully, you are providing so many Oregon children with these opportunities.

Let's continue to lead the Nation in this movement! Thank you for your support!

Best regards,
Amoreena Guerrero
Program Director
Growing Gardens
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