



February 5, 2024

TO: House Education Committee

Re HB 4082

Dear House Education Committee and members of the Oregon State Legislature :

Thank you for your time and all that you do in support of community and children throughout the state of Oregon. We value and share that commitment and believe that investment in today's youth supports tomorrow's leaders.

The Walla Walla YMCA serves several small, rural communities in Eastern Oregon. We are the leading provider of summer STEM and Social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula both during the school year in our licensed child care programs. During summer we work to bridge learning gaps and help youth ages 3-12 thrive in their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. There are many who can provide you the data of how underserved, low income, rural communities flourish when there are dedicated resources available to address the educational and behavioral needs of Oregon's youth. We would like to share some specific examples of how funding makes a difference in summer outreach and youth engagement.

Not only do we ask your support of HB 4082 for what it can give to Oregon's youth, we give back to the communities served.

- We partner with the Athena -Weston and Milton-Freewater school districts as the only provider of summer-long programs for youth in these communities.
- We recruit and train local high school students as counselors, which helps to bolster the economy of the local community.
- We provide field trips to local points of interest, including the local library, shops, pools and museums in these communities to build youth awareness and pride in their neighborhoods.
- We engage parents/guardians in their child's activities and encourage their active involvement to broaden understanding and acceptance of the region's rich cultural diversity.
- In 2023, we served over 200 youth in full day weekly-themed summer programs that extended to 9 weeks. We offered a safe, nurturing educational and engaging opportunity for young people who would otherwise stay home; at best isolated on their electronic devices, at worst footloose and involved in disruptive activities that cost the community.

Where summer camp costs are spiraling across the country, in Oregon we strive to make camps affordable and accessible to all. In our communities, the school districts provide free lunch daily under the USDA's SFSP nutrition program. Yet parents and providers alone cannot bear the cost burden of camp staff salaries, afternoon refreshments and supplies. With State support in 2022 we served over 230 youth; absent that support in 2023 we served 26% fewer children. Where feasible we pursue donations and grants to help parents who are struggling financially because we know that when parents cannot afford camp kids pay the price.

We thank you for your consideration and support. HB 4082 is a much-needed solution whose time has come.

Sincerely,

*Karen Hedine*

Karen Hedine, CEO

Walla Walla YMCA

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