

Submitter: Susannah Castle

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB466

Dear Oregon Legislators,

We are writing in support bill SB 466 that will fund the Oregon Summer Star Camp for the children of military families. Our two younger children (both aged 11 at the time) participated for the first time this past year, and it was an extraordinary experience for both of them. When we picked them up, they were both tearfully departing from new friends, and making promises to return the following year. They made friends and community and memories for a lifetime. The camp emphasized friendship-building, community, and integrating emotional tools for kids who have experienced significant disruptions, separation, and long periods of displacement during parental deployments. The camp gave our kids a place to feel seen and understood and not alone in their experiences. In our family, which is blended, we have four shared kids between what are now six parental figures (two couples, both divorced and remarried). Three of the kids' parents and/or stepparents are enlisted, and the kids have experienced deployments, moves related to changes of station, and reassignment. Prior to camp, our kids did not have a clear capacity to name the unique experience, good and bad, of being a military kid, together with other kids. They both came home from camp with what felt to us like more inner peace and emotional resilience, as well as shared friendship with one another (they are step-siblings),

The camp was unique because it allowed families with lesser financial means to participate. We could never have afforded the cost of a typical sleep-away camp for two kids. The camp was full of families from all over the state. We met many parents at the drop off and pick up ceremonies. Their stories were profound, and it was clear how passionate many of the families and campers were about trying to return every year. It was also clear that the camp is run on the heart and soul of the leaders, who volunteer impossible amounts of time and resource.

By fully funding this camp, the Oregon Legislature will be supporting the most vulnerable part of military life, which is the impact service has on children in military families. These kids go through more transition, loss, change, and disruption than is typical for any stable family, and they do it in service to their country. I humbly request that the state recognize the profound impact financially stabilizing Oregon Summer Star will provide, so that there is reliability in this part of these kids' lives, rather than fear year to year that the camp may not exist due to lack of support and funding. By fully funding the camp, you will be giving military families the thing they are unable to promise their own children, which is a consistent and reliable place to

return to to call home.

Sincerely,

Susannah Castle and Major John Geffert

also: Sergeant Amy Castle, Lieutenant Colonel Michelle Thilavanh