

Submitter: Trevor Balsley
On Behalf Of: Oregon Summer Star
Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency
Management, Federal and World Affairs
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB466

My name is Trevor Balsley, I am 23 years old, and for the better part of the past decade Oregon Summer Star has been an integral part of my life, education, and coming of age. Oregon Summer Star is a truly unique program in the state of Oregon. No other organization in our state serves the needs of military children and their families in such a specific manner and with such a holistic methodology. As a high school sophomore and outsider to the program in 2017, I quickly came to realize what a beautiful community I had been invited into and how vital a role it played in the lives of the campers, their families, and the staff members who worked tirelessly to make camp happen year after year.

Returning for one week a year every summer, campers tell us it feels like coming home; saying they've been counting down the days until the start of camp since we waved goodbye to them last summer. Five-year veterans and first-time campers alike echo the same sentiments year after year; that Oregon Summer Star is the first/only community in their lives where they feel seen for who they are, encouraged to express themselves authentically, and surrounded by peers with an unspoken understanding of their lived experiences. Without an active base community in Oregon for military kids to meet each other and socialize, Oregon Summer Star is often one of the only opportunities our campers have to spend time with fellow military children. They often feel isolated in their experiences in military families in school or on sports teams and in other extracurriculars with no one who can relate to the hardships, stress, and loneliness that military children often endure during long deployments.

For years now we have approached every year as if it might be our last, with funding drying out more and more each year. We are a team of volunteers who work year round, unpaid, in the free time we have from our full time jobs, to make camp happen for these kids every year. This bill, and the financial cushion it would give us, would allow our fundraising to take on a more sustainable role for our organization instead of the desperation drive it is every year in our current state. The funding from this bill would cover our bare minimum essentials, allowing us to fundraise to deliver exciting field trips, activities, and resources for our kids and their families. Such a small action from the legislature and the Nation Guard could make such a large impact on the lives of our families.