

Submitter: Emory Mort
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3199

Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, members of House Committee on Education, my name is Emory Mort, I reside in Rep Isadore's district, and I previously had the honor and pleasure of working as a staffer for Representative Hoa Nguyen as part of her and Senator Weber's absenteeism workgroup from April-December of 2024. I am submitting testimony on my own behalf, not representing my current employer. From 2022-2024 I also worked for three years as the Chief of Staff for chairs of Oregon's House and Senate Education Committees.

It is very important and laudable that this topic is receiving sustained attention from elected legislators who know the work intimately. This is a community-wide issue and our elected legislators are elected to represent and advocate for improving these outcomes. Rep Nguyen brings her extensive professional experience working to improve attendance in multiple districts, schools, and ESD's in areas urban, exurban, and rural. It has been my experience that Senator Weber brings her experience as a longtime teacher, a veteran political and community leader who knows her districts, and from growing up in a remote area where school attendance was not a given for everyone around her.

The workgroup, whose work is not over but is well-captured by this omnibus, has been a successful one. Extensive materials from the workgroup are archived on OLIS for review, and I think any reviewer will agree with many of the workgroup participants that this topic was covered extensively and from many angles, local to national, from attendance specialists to superintendents. It has been my experience that your legislative colleagues have led by listening to people doing this work, not by pushing pre-conceived solutions. All along, the co-chairs have expressed that they are not interested in re-creating the wheel or attempting to implement splashy new programs. Rather, the intent has been to understand the practices and thinking out there today, and choose the best areas for increased attention and legislative investment. And all along they've known that improving attendance results is not an easy task with a silver bullet solution. If it was, districts and communities would have solved it by now.

This legislation's passage - including the grants to provide a raised floor of support to our statewide districts who are fighting hard and in unique ways to improve attendance - would validate the significant effort from subject matter experts to show up to the workgroup meetings, review materials, and put forth suggestions.

Now is an important time to advance. Wise action by the legislature in this session

would be complementary to the growing and timely emphasis on school attendance we have seen in the past year from districts and educators around the state, plus the state's Governor, the Oregon School Board Association, ODE, ESD's, and the Coalition of School Administrators.

I anticipate in the public hearing you will hear from many corners of the state about the importance of the phenomenon of kids and families missing more school, and many educators feeling powerless to reverse the trend. I urge the committee to recommend the funding and passage of this legislation, as part of our shared goal of providing excellent public schools that enrich and in many cases anchor the lives of Oregon's great variety of communities. Thank you for your service, and for your consideration.