

Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Stacey Morris, and I am a teacher in the Greater Albany Public Schools. This is my 26th year of teaching, and I have never seen the conditions in our kindergarten classrooms as unsustainable as they are now.

I started this school year with 28 kindergarten students and no aides. Teaching 28 five-year-olds has never been easy, but in today's environment, it is simply not sustainable. Kindergarten is where children come to learn how to be students—we teach them everything from how to line up, make friends, and raise their hands to how to blow their noses, wash their hands, and even use the toilet. Many of my students need individualized attention, and with a class this large, it is impossible to provide it.

At the beginning of the school year, we already had 11 students with IEPs, and many more who still need to be assessed. The difference in what I was able to provide last year—when I had 17 students—compared to this year is night and day. One of the biggest things I have noticed is the confidence levels of students in smaller classes. Many kindergarteners come straight from home or a small preschool setting with a 1-to-10 teacher ratio—and then they are suddenly placed in a room with 27 other children, all of them learning how to navigate a school environment for the first time. Without the ability to individualize attention, many of these students fall behind before they even get started.

When my union was negotiating class size, it did not make sense that we could only bargain for class size at Title I schools. Why shouldn't all educators have the ability to bargain for class size? While my school is not a Title I school, I have Title I students with special needs who are specifically sent to my school. Their needs do not change just because they are in a non-Title I school.

Because of our union's work, we now have a reasonable cap in place—24 students per class in non-Title I schools and 21 in Title I schools. This means that when class sizes exceed this limit, the district must hire more teachers—at least until our class size fund runs out. Any district in the state could negotiate something similar with their employees, but only if they are required to discuss it at the bargaining table. That's why we need HB 3652.

I look forward to next school year because I know we were finally heard when it comes to kindergarten class size. But not all educators in Oregon have that opportunity. HB 3652 will ensure that all teachers—regardless of where they work—can advocate for reasonable class sizes that allow students to learn and thrive.

I urge you to pass HB 3652 so that more educators can have a voice in making our schools inclusive, effective, and safe.

Thank you for your time and consideration.