

March 7, 2025

House Committee On Education
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the Committee:

My name is Chrystell Reed, and I serve as the Executive Director of Ridgeline Montessori Public Charter School in Eugene, Oregon. I write today to urge your support for **House Bill 3444**, which seeks to correct the long-standing inequities in Oregon's public charter school funding model.

Oregon's public charter schools play a vital role in the state's public education system, offering **innovative, student-centered learning environments** that families actively choose to best support their children's unique educational needs. At Ridgeline Montessori, we provide a **high-quality, public Montessori education** to a diverse student body. Despite **persistent funding challenges**, our students consistently outperform district averages on state assessments while also reporting a **strong sense of belonging and community**. This success is a direct result of the **commitment and innovative approaches** public charter schools bring to education.

Charter schools like Ridgeline provide **proven alternative models**, including Montessori, Waldorf, language immersion, and project-based learning. These models foster **deep community engagement, high family involvement, and a shared sense of responsibility for student success**. At Ridgeline, our families and staff actively contribute to creating an enriching educational environment that allows students to thrive. However, sustaining these high-quality programs requires **equitable funding**.

The Problem: Charter Schools Are Unfairly Underfunded

Oregon's current school funding structure **shortchanges public charter school students**. Unlike district-run public schools, charter schools receive **only 80%** of the per-student **State School Fund (SSF) allocation**. Moreover, they are often **excluded from numerous other funding streams** that districts can access. According to a recent **ECONorthwest report**, Oregon's public charter schools receive **less than half** the total per-student funding that district-run schools receive.

This growing **funding gap is unsustainable**. Over the past decade, charter school enrollment has increased, yet funding relative to enrollment has declined. Without a **fair share** of the SSF Grant and access to local, state, and federal education dollars, this disparity will continue to widen, placing charter schools at an ever-greater disadvantage. **At 80% funding, this means that 1 out of every 5 students is not funded, yet we are still expected and committed to providing a high-quality public education.**

At Ridgeline Montessori, the funding shortfall is evident in:

- **Teacher and Staff Compensation Gaps:** We cannot offer salaries **competitive with our sponsoring district**, making staff recruitment and retention more challenging.
- **Limited Support Services and Elective Offerings:** Our ability to provide **services and programs**, enrichment activities, and electives is constrained by funding shortages.
- **Facility Limitations:** Unlike district-run schools, we **lack adequate funding for facility improvements and maintenance**, limiting the services we can offer students.
- **Reliance on Fundraising for Core Programs:** We must **fundraise extensively** to support programs like **physical education and art**, which should be fundamental components of every public school experience.

The Solution: HB 3444 Ensures Fair Funding for All Public School Students

HB 3444 addresses these inequities by:

- **Increasing charter school SSF allocation from 80% to 95%**, ensuring fairer funding for students regardless of school model.
- **Granting charter school students access to the same local, state, and federal education funding** that district-run schools receive.

Equitable funding is essential for maintaining and strengthening the **high-quality education** that Oregon's charter schools provide. Without fair financial support, **charter schools will continue to face unnecessary hurdles**, limiting educational opportunities for Oregon families.

All Oregon students deserve **fair funding**, regardless of whether they attend a district-run or charter school. **On behalf of our teachers, staff, and, most importantly, our students, I urge you to support HB 3444.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chrystell Reed, Executive Director