

HB 3365 - Formal Letter of Support

Dear Chair Neron and members of the House Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 3365. My name is Mariena Joy. I live on the southern Oregon coast in CoosBay.

I've served as a therapist in Oregon for a number of years. I have worked as a school therapist, as a children's therapist, and in private practice. I've had the unique opportunity to work with children and young adults in the tribes and in the schools. My primary specialty is trauma work.

I strongly support HB 3365 - which seeks to expand and integrate climate change instruction across all K-12 core subject areas (language arts, sciences, mathematics, social studies, health, physical education and the arts).

In my years as a therapist I have seen a distressing rise in children who are coming to me with hopelessness, panic attacks, ptsd... all related to climate change. One youth the other day said,

“Frankly. Im scared. I'm angry, I'm worried, and I'm terrified. I don't know what's happening and I don't know what to do.”

I have worked with many children who express hopelessness that they won't live to be adults because they think the world won't sustain human life. Kids who don't make plans for their futures and don't dream about what they want to be when they grow up. Children, teens, young adults who say they will never have their own children because the world is just going to burn anyways. I've wiped away tears of small children who are confused and terrified as they tell me the story of their home, their whole city, burning to the ground.

Children who don't understand why year after year, more cities burn, and the air fills with smoke again.

Frankly, I'm extremely concerned about the future of our children. In my experience, the mental health of Oregon's children is being deeply affected by their lack of knowledge and lack of hope around climate change. Children who don't think there is a point in trying to make a better world or to plan for the future ...don't plan for the future.

I would like to talk about the difference I have seen in youth from one of the local tribes and from one of the local schools that have some measure of education around climate sustainability. In the charter school that teaches about agriculture, clean water, solutions to pollution, and encourages children to participate in activities related to this: I have seen a significant reduction in hopelessness, anxiety, and (most exciting) PTSD from children who were displaced by a climate-related disaster.

The youth from the tribes present with more anger. They express more understanding about what is happening and about sustainability practices. But they still continue to express uncertainty about what they can do and how they can help. They express anger that they are not seeing action taken around them. Their mental health is still very much affected.

HB 3365 - Formal Letter of Support

I am seeing that children who understand more about what is happening with the climate and what they can do, experience better mental health and plan for the future more .

House bill 3365 provides an opportunity for all Oregon students to learn about climate change with a focus on local impacts and connections. I have seen in practice how vital this is to our children's mental health. I worked with a child with PTSD for weeks following a natural disaster. The first time they were able to talk to me was while we were tending the garden at a school.

Our children KNOW something is wrong. They know that the climate is changing. There is enough talk around them that they know that the fires are not normal. That the flooding and the droughts are not normal. Age appropriate knowledge about what is going on and what they can do is empowering, protects their mental health, and keeps them focused on a better future.

The children of today are the people who are going to continue to do the work to keep our planet healthy and move towards sustainability. If they are not inspired to do so, then there will be no one to do the work.

Oregon lawmakers can make a difference by giving children this empowering opportunity. You can leave behind a legacy of hope. You can ensure that Oregon will continue to embolden young minds to preserve Oregon's resources and do your duty to protect the mental health of our children.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 3365- Comprehensive Climate Change Education in Oregon schools.

Thank you for your support of HB 3365! It is time for Oregon to take leadership in becoming the second state to legislate comprehensive climate education.

Sincerely,

Mariena Joy, LCSW, EMDR Consultant.