

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:

As a parent of an Oregon public charter school student, I am writing today in support of House Bill 3444. HB 3444 will fix a deep disparity currently happening in Oregon schools: that Oregon public charter school students are essentially funded at 48 cents on the dollar compared to district students. Public charter school students are public school students, and it's past time to fund their education fairly.

Almost every public charter school parent has a story as to why a public charter school became the right fit for their child. Many started out in traditional public schools, but couldn't receive the education they deserved, often due to learning challenges that required specialized attention beyond what a public-school classroom could provide, or physical, developmental, or mental health challenges that public schools simply couldn't, or wouldn't, accommodate for.

As a parent in the Woodburn school district, I chose to enroll my children in WAA(k-5), a public charter school because of the lack of education in Woodburn, high student-to-teacher ratio, and low school scores of my neighboring elementary schools. Most elementary schools in this district have 400-600+ students and an average student-to-teacher ratio of 19:1. They also have extremely low-test scores in comparison to the rest of the state of Oregon. Oregon in general compared to other states is severely lacking in student comprehension and testing proficiency as well as personal attention to students who need it. The Woodburn school district's current rate of proficiency is only 11% for math and 18% for reading. The state itself is at 32% for math and 44% for reading.

WAA has less than 150 students currently enrolled, 79% of those students are economically at a disadvantage, and 82% are in the minority. WAA scored 12% in math and 27% for reading, while these scores are still below state levels, they are significantly better than other neighboring schools. This can be attributed to a higher standard of education, more advanced curriculum and a much smaller student-to-teacher ratio of 12-1. Students at WAA can get the individualized attention they deserve in academics as well as emotional support and understanding, that you just can't get in a public school.

However, there are several difficulties with attending a public charter school. The Woodburn school district is a low-income school district that provides free lunch to all students. WAA receives lunches brought over from neighboring public schools that are often lacking. There are not enough 1st choice meals for all students. 2nd choice options are horrible and may include items such as previously frozen soggy peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, hard bagels, greasy peanut butter, yogurt and a piece of cheese. These are not acceptable food choices for lunch menu. Students are often left disappointed and hungry, because of inedible food. Most families rely on schools to provide adequate lunches for students, this includes public charter schools!

The last two or more years the Woodburn school district has received funding support regarding school supplies. WAA received no such support, leaving parents with the financial burden and teachers to personally fill in the gaps for students who cannot afford supplies.

WAA also does not follow the school district's attendance schedule as all AA public charter schools are on the same one, even though they are in different districts. This causes unnecessary transportation issues. WAA students often are in attendance when the Woodburn school district is not and vice versa. This leads to many days when no school buses are available, further increasing the burden on parents and decreasing the attendance rates for those who cannot attend without adequate transportation.

Charter schools play a key role in every community, providing an alternative learning environment in small scale settings with advanced curriculum. There are, however, things that could be done to drastically increase the support for parents and teachers at charter schools in the Woodburn school district and across the state. But unfortunately, because of Oregon's current school funding model, public charter schools are significantly underfunded. Many buildings are old and in need of upgrades, students can't access transportation services, food

security programs are limited, and schools lack essential school supplies and mental health resources. By passing HB 3444, you can fix this ongoing disparity and provide fair funding for public charter school students who deeply need it.

Please vote yes on HB 3444.

Thank you,