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

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

Good Afternoon.

For the record, my name is John Nelsen, and I serve as the Executive
Director of Rockwood Preparatory Academy, a public charter school
situated within the racially and economically diverse Rockwood Community
in East Multnomah County.

At Rockwood Prep, diversity transcends mere words; it is fundamental to
our identity. Over 75% of our student body is comprised of individuals of
color, with 100% of our students qualifying for the federal free and
reduced-price meal program. Oregon's charter schools frequently cater to
historically underserved populations, including low-income students,
students of color, and students with disabilities.

Our mission at Rockwood Prep is to foster excellence and justice in
education, ensuring that all students (K-5) acquire the reading, arithmetic,
spelling, and writing skills essential for success in middle school and
beyond. We are a public elementary school model that dismantles the
misconception that a child's racial background and economic status dictate
their capacity for achieving high academic standards. Our school
community is dedicated to this mission.

For the past twenty-five years, charter schools like ours have increasingly contributed to communities like Rockwood across the state. Numerous educational innovations in Oregon—such as project-based learning and personalized instruction—have emerged from charter schools. Nevertheless, a recent analysis by ECONorthwest revealed that Oregon public charter schools receive less than half the funding of their district counterparts.

After nearly 25 years, House Bill 3444 addresses this funding disparity by ensuring that students in the state's charter schools receive financial support that aligns more closely with their peers in traditional schools.

Today, I speak not only as a leader in the charter school sector, but also as a father of five children, all of whom have attended neighborhood public schools, and as a decade-long member of my local public school board. My involvement in Oregon education allows me to reflect on the pivotal moment in 1991 when voters recognized the necessity for equitable funding in Oregon schools by passing Measure 5, which introduced the "equalization formula." In the years that followed, this formula has sought to allocate state funds among school districts on a student-by-student basis, irrespective of local revenue. Unfortunately, this "equalization" has never been extended to Oregon students attending public charter schools. The time has come!

I urge today's generation of Oregon leaders to reaffirm our state's commitment to equity for all public school students by passing House Bill 3444.

Respectfully,

John Nelsen, Executive Director
Rockwood Preparatory Academy