

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:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak at the public testimony session in Salem on Wednesday. As the Executive Director of the Portland Village School in Portland, on behalf of our students, I urge you to support House Bill 3444 and help ameliorate the extreme disparity in funding charter school students face.

This is my 21st year as an educator in Oregon. My first 14 years were as a teacher and TOSA in the Beaverton and Gresham Barlow school districts. When I completed my doctorate and went into administration I found myself within the Public Charter School system. I was shocked by what I found - that there was an appalling lack of financial and other supports for students in charter schools.

Portland Village School is an arts focused and relationship based Public Waldorf Charter school. 30% of my students currently have IEPs and 504s and a great many more are also neurodivergent. Our families choose us because our model is most flexible to support their exceptional learners. These are the students whose learning should be the most encouraged and nurtured, yet because Charter schools do not qualify for transportation funding, these students have further barriers to their schooling. You can fix this with HB3444.

Charter schools have significant facilities expenses, which in the Portland area are exorbitant. While some districts have surplus buildings that they can sell or rent to charter schools, that is not the case in PPS sponsored schools; we are on our own to find a building. Upon losing our lease of 14 years, we began a 3 year struggle to find a location or close. Having to be in PPS district boundaries, and needing square footage for 444 students we faced extreme challenges in the most

expensive property market in the state. There was literally only one building that could serve our needs, and it was only available for sale. Our annual debt service cost to get into the building is ~ 1.5 million for the next 35 years. Utilities and other space expenses are an additional \$600,000+ annually.

While Oregon does have school Seismic Retrofit Grants which could have offset some expenditures reducing overall costs, charter schools who own their own buildings do not qualify for them. The result is that our students' already limited SSF dollars are being used to pay for the seismic retrofit that their neighborhood peers have covered by the state. This is just an example of the local, state and federal funds charter school students can't currently access; HB3444 can fix this.

PVS is proudly one of two Portland area charter schools to have a National School Lunch Program. Most charter schools do not participate because the expenses are high, the costs for compliance and reporting are high, and the few funds for meal reimbursement we can get are much too low to cover the expenses. PVS has been subsidizing the costs of the NSLP program because we believe in its value from an equity perspective. However, with the rising costs of food, and our increased facilities expenses we will not be able to continue with this program next year, which is heartbreaking and a financial reality.

While I have addressed the funding needs I also want to address the false flag that was raised at the hearing regarding charter registration and unprofessional teachers. That is a story I believed as well when I was a proud union member teacher/TOSA. It wasn't until I got into charter schools that I realized what I had been told was not really the case. It is not the case that my charter licensed teachers are not professional educators, rather most of them are professional educators for whom a traditional license is not applicable. This is an example of my teaching staff who have been charter registered:

- My art teacher was a licensed middle school Math-Science teacher, who did not want to go back to school to qualify for the endorsement in art.
- I have a teacher who is 3 credits shy on her MAT but had a family illness, took time off school and does not want to take on loans to finish.

- I have several teachers who have taken 3 years of masters degree level coursework to become certified Waldorf teachers, but who do not have a MAT, so cannot be regularly licensed. There are no universities on the west coast who offer dual Waldorf certification and MAT programs.
- I have International teachers who have the equivalent of MAT degrees that do not transfer to the USA.
- I have Native Spanish speakers, with years of language teaching experience here or abroad, who cannot afford to go back to school.
- I have 5 teachers currently teaching full time while completing their MAT programs. Many were in Teach for America or taught abroad for many years prior to teaching at PVS. They are charter registered.

The reality is that until we remove barriers to higher education access and until we fund charter schools such that I can offer a tuition reimbursement to my staff, and competitive benefits, a charter registered license is a tool for equity and a necessary reality for charter schools.

We recognize that there are some costs to districts to support charter schools, and we know those costs are far less than than the 20% that is retained. In PPS a study was conducted and the annual cost to administer the charter school program is 1.5% and up to 2% which was seen in a year when a PPS charter school closed causing the need for district time related to the closure. At the 95% pass-through rate, that still leaves an additional 3% beyond what is a reasonable estimate for costs for districts. We ask you to pass HB3444 and right size the pass-through to reflect reasonable costs to districts.

I know you are hearing from superintendents, school districts, students and their families about how broken our school funding model is. You are hearing from OSEA and COSA how hard it is to be an educator right now. If that is the reality for schools who have 100% of SSF and full access to federal dollars, imagine then how much worse it is to be at a public charter school, to be a student at a school receiving only 80% of SSF for a total of 48% of what others receive! That is the reality for our charter school students. They deserve better from us. You have the chance to make right a compromised piece of outdated legislation that for years

has put undue hardships on the backs of charter school students. I urge you to fix this now for charter school children and pass HB3444, while you continue to work to fix the broader state school funding problem. Both can and should be done.

Thank you for your service and for all you do for kids - my students are counting on you.

~ Dr. Jennifer Stackhouse, "Dr. J" Ed.D.
Executive Director, Portland Village School