

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Dobson, Vice-Chair McIntyre, and Members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Greta Horn. I am an Oregonian and a second-generation commercial fisherman. Two of my children are third-generation fishers. Over the course of my lifetime, I have witnessed the steady decline of small, family-owned fishing boats. I am committed to preserving and promoting the fishing way of life for my children and for other small boat fishermen across Oregon. Small boat fisheries play a vital role in sustaining coastal communities not just in Oregon, but across America's coastlines. We are an integral part of the cultural heritage that, alongside the beauty of the ocean, draws tourists and inspires many to call these coastal towns home.

For years, I have been working to bring a commercial kitchen and seafood value-added facility to life in Coos Bay. This facility would allow myself and other local small-boat fishers to add value to our catch, helping us compete in an industry that has recently become increasingly consolidated and corporate. Over time, vessels and processors have become larger and more industrial, leaving small operators like myself with fewer options. I firmly believe that unless small boat operators can find or create local and regional markets where we can catch, process, and distribute our seafood sustainably, the dominance of large catcher vessels and corporate processing plants will wipe out the diversity and vibrancy of our harbors. Small fishing towns will lose the cultural draw that makes them so unique, and the essence of these communities will be at risk.

Another critical concern is the impact of corporate consolidation on ocean health and seafood quality. When large corporations take control of industries, profit often becomes the sole focus, sidelining sustainability efforts and respect for the ocean's health. Small boat fishermen are typically the first to notice pollution, stock degradation, or other environmental issues. Without us, who will monitor what is happening at sea? The observer program, as it currently exists, has proven to be ineffective in ensuring true oversight.

Seafood, as one of the healthiest and most sustainable sources of protein, has an important role in nutrition of Oregon's schoolchildren. The Oregon Farm to School Network provides healthy, locally sourced food to students. Having attended numerous "farm to fork" and food hub meetings, I know that many passionate individuals are working hard to keep local food, local. While many people may immediately think of crab, halibut, shrimp, or salmon when they think of seafood, there are numerous other delicious, nutritious options from the ocean that could be introduced to school lunch programs.

By supporting HB3568 and exploring options to purchase seafood directly from small boat operators or local processors, we can not only help sustain these small businesses but also provide high-quality, healthy, and traceable food for our children. This approach benefits our coastal communities and ensures that kids are eating food that supports both their health and local economies.

Additionally, sourcing seafood locally can help reduce transportation costs, eliminate unnecessary packaging, and simplify marketing. These factors can make seafood more affordable for schools working with limited budgets.

In conclusion, HB3568 represents a unique opportunity to foster a symbiotic relationship between a significant industry and the educational needs of our children. It allows us to support struggling small boat fishermen, preserve the cultural heritage of our coastal towns, and provide healthier, more sustainable meals for Oregon's students. By moving forward with this bill, we are ensuring that Oregon's small boat fishing communities remain viable and that our children benefit from the healthiest, most sustainable food options available.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Greta Horn