

March 24, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Education

RE: Strong Support for SB 749

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

My name is Natan Hadgu, and I am a student from Portland, at McDaniel High School. I am a student leader within my school, my community, and my family, and from a young age, I have been passionate about creating opportunities for others to be recognized and heard. At just 15, I had the privilege of participating in Oregon's first Participatory Budgeting (PB) process, Youth Voice, Youth Vote (YV2), where I worked alongside so many inspiring and dedicated youth and adults. As someone who came to the United States only a few years ago, PB was my first introduction to the world of advocacy, civics, and community engagement. Learning through PB felt like being thrown into the deep end but discovering I could swim—and that others were swimming alongside me. Youth Voice Youth Vote, gave me the space not only to share my voice but to collaborate with peers from diverse backgrounds—many of whom, like me, had never imagined themselves as part of a democratic process.

I've witnessed firsthand how powerful it is when students come together to make decisions about their schools. I see it every day in my role as a student leader: young people are passionate, thoughtful, and serious about how their education affects them. They want to be included in spaces where they can share their voices and make real change in their lives. In my role as a steering committee member and youth facilitator within PB-Youth Voice Youth Vote, I have seen many students come together to discuss how they can make their communities better. I have watched them plan projects, carefully consider the values they want to reflect, and think critically about how to be true changemakers in their schools and neighborhoods. I have seen them radiate passion, a deep sense of purpose, and a commitment to improving the world around them.

In my school, I have seen diverse groups of students deeply invested in their education and their school communities. The School Participatory Budgeting Act (SB 749) creates a pilot program that would give students the opportunity to directly decide how a portion of their school's budget is spent. This bill would give students a meaningful seat at the table—allowing them to turn their concerns and ideas into tangible improvements in their schools. Especially with the recent budget cuts in Portland Public Schools, I've seen many of my peers worried about the future of our schools. I've also seen them step up—advocating for more resources and pushing for greater youth participation in decisions that directly impact us.

While Senate Bill 749 is not a solution to all the challenges facing our schools, it is a critical step forward. By launching this pilot Participatory Budgeting program, the bill creates a much-needed space for students to show their voice and make real changes in their schools. It empowers us to directly shape the places where we learn, making our education more responsive to our actual needs.

Participatory budgeting taught me valuable skills—how to build connections, how to listen, how to translate ideas into real projects. More importantly, it showed me that students are more than capable of making informed, thoughtful decisions about their learning environments.

I urge you to support the School Participatory Budgeting Act. It's not just an investment in a program—it's an investment in student leadership, civic engagement, and the future of Oregon's schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Natan Hadgu