



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 Blanca Gaytan Farfan and I am the Policy and Communications Director for Participatory Budgeting Oregon. We work for more participatory and just public budgeting for all Oregonians by centering the expertise and leadership of underrepresented communities. I am writing in support of SB 749 to create a pilot program for participatory budgeting that would allow students to decide investments in their schools.

Existing school budgeting processes don't often provide inclusive and accessible opportunities for student participation, shared decision-making and there is little to no student voice. Participatory budgeting (PB) is a mechanism that is used in the United States and all over the world and has been adopted at every level of schooling, from elementary through college. Through school PB, students "learn democracy by doing" through a process of generating ideas, developing proposals, campaigning and deliberating, and voting to fund projects that build stronger school communities.

Through the PB process, students have the opportunity to learn about school budgets, how dollars are spent, the trade offs in funding priorities and decisions, and there is more transparency and accountability over funds. Students become more knowledgeable, make informed decisions, and work in partnership with their peers and adults such as administrators, teachers and board members, and build lifelong practices for civic participation.

In Oregon, youth led the way for PB by designing and executing Youth Voice Youth Vote, the first community-wide PB process and today youth are ready to lead once more by piloting PB in schools. Allowing students to collectively decide how to spend a portion of their school budget is an investment in Oregon's classrooms. This is an opportunity for students to be heard, for school leadership to learn directly about the needs of their students, and for new ideas to address those needs to be generated and implemented, so that students are better served.

Now more than ever, we need to support students and giving them a voice in their education is an investment in their success. Once again, I urge you to support SB 749 and pass it out of committee.

Thank you,

Blanca Gaytan Farfan
Policy and Communications Director
Participatory Budgeting Oregon