

March 25, 2025

TO: Senate Committee on Education  
FROM: Grace Fortson, Our Children Oregon  
SUBJECT: Support for SB 749

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee,

My name is Grace Fortson, I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager with Our Children Oregon (OCO). OCO is a statewide nonprofit committed to whole child wellbeing through the Children's Agenda- a comprehensive legislative agenda created and supported by our over 135 member organizations across the state. OCO stands in strong support of this bill as a way to engage and support youth engagement in education and community.

As a college student, I was able to participate in many internships, fellowships, and research projects that gave me invaluable hands-on learning that I carry with me today. There is simply no stand in for that kind of learning. I know that our students will carry these lessons forward with them in their future civic engagement as well as personal and professional budgeting.

Further, youth have a right to be engaged in their schools' decision making processes. According to our most recent KIDS COUNT data cards, only 64.5% of Oregon's youth feel safe in school and only 59.5% of youth feel connected and belonging<sup>1</sup>. This indicates that we have significant work to do in making our schools a welcoming environment for learning for all Oregon students.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/publications/oregon-kids-count/>

The School Participatory Budgeting Act will provide an avenue to elevate student voice and it is an opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience with their school budgeting process. Allowing students to collectively decide how to spend part of their schools budget is an investment in Oregon's classrooms. As a representative of OCO, we ask that you please support SB 749 and pass it out of committee.

Thank you,

Grace Fortson, Policy and Advocacy, Our Children Oregon

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