

March 24, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Education

RE: Strong Support for SB 749

Hello Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber and members of the committee, my name is Xavier Juarez, I am from Troutdale and I am a student at Reynolds High School. I have been involved with Participatory Budgeting for over two years now through various leadership programs. I have seen the positive impact of this process and that is why I am here to talk about supporting SB 749 today.

Supporting this bill is an investment in youth voice in Oregon. By implementing this pilot program into our public schools, students will gain a sense of empowerment that they have never felt previously, just as I have. For Reynolds High School, youth voice is crucial. We are undergoing major budget cuts within the next year, changing what school could look like for us all. Which draws to the importance of having student voice included in budgeting. We are the population most impacted by the fiscal decisions made by the administration, so it only makes sense that we have a voice on the matter.

There is a lack of opportunity to engage in processes like PB at my school. And after directly engaging with youth, administrators and board members, I found that there is an interest in it. Through Participatory Budgeting, youth like myself learn valuable skills like how to create projects that critically consider the issues around us while collaborating with different peers and adults. Developing real life solutions to real life problems, and gaining experience having real power over real money.

And in my experience with PB, that's what I have learned too. Never before would I have considered advocacy of this kind because of the idea that my perspective does not matter enough to say anything. Yet, through different PB programs I have been inspired enough to involve myself more in the community, becoming a bigger advocate than I ever have been before and helping to build the foundation of who I am today. I have received many opportunities through my participation with PB, an internship that has connected me directly to the career path I wish to pursue in the future and a youth advisory council I have recently gotten back from Washington DC with. If not for PB in my own life, I would have not been able to build the bridges that I have today.

We need more opportunities for youth to be involved in impactful decision making like budgeting, which will in turn create a more empowered, strong and connected community.

So I ask you to support the passing of SB 749. Thank you.

Xavier Juarez