

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 Adina Rodriguez and I'm from Gresham. I'm a two-year early graduate from Gresham High School, I'm currently attending Mt. Hood Community College, and I'll be heading to UC Davis next fall to study biology. I'm here today because I care about this bill. I've seen firsthand how Participatory Budgeting (PB) gives young people a voice, and I genuinely believe it can change lives.

I've been part of PB as a student leader and it's one of the most powerful experiences I've had. It taught me that my voice matters. It gave me the confidence to speak up in rooms where students are often overlooked and to realize that we have the power to shape the environments we live and learn in. I've seen students who once thought their ideas didn't count, propose projects that made their schools safer, more welcoming, and more equitable. That's what PB does. It creates space for youth to lead, not just to be heard.

But it's more than skill-building. It's about trust. When you give students real decision-making power, you're showing us that our ideas and experiences are valuable. You're telling us that we belong at the table when decisions are made, not just when they're announced. That kind of validation sticks with you. It's stuck with me. It's why I'm now leading the Youth Advisory Council for the City of Gresham, why I've traveled to advocate for youth voices, and why I'm standing here today.

Because the truth is, Oregon needs more opportunities like PB. When young people are involved in budgeting, we become more engaged, more invested, and more connected to our communities. It gives us a sense of ownership and responsibility that carries into adulthood. And let's be honest. If we're old enough to be impacted by these decisions, we're old enough to help make them.

For me, PB sparked something that stuck. It made me want to do more. It made me realize that young people, no matter our age, are capable of creating real change when we're given the chance. That's what this bill will do. It's more than just policy. It's a promise to invest in youth as true partners in shaping their schools and their futures.

So, I'm asking you to support SB 749. Believe in what youth can do when you give us the chance. I promise you, we're ready.

Thank you,

Adina Rodriguez