

To: ____ Chair Hartman, Vice Chair Nguyen, Vice Chair Scharf, and Members of the Early Childhood and Human Services Committee

From: Jennifer Salazar, **Oregon School Boards Association**

Re: **HB 2374** – Related to establishing the CARE Program to address chronic absenteeism in Oregon K-12 students.

House Bill 2374 establishes the CARE Program within the Youth Development Division to award grants to counties and local organizations to provide a collaborative and integrated social service delivery network to engage with families and offer education, support, and advocacy to create positive school-to-home relationships that reduce obstacles to school attendance and academic performance. Local school districts will identify students who need attendance support and refer them to a local CARE program for a needs assessment and services designed to help the child gain consistent attendance at school.

A key priority for OSBA this session is to support legislation that addresses chronic absenteeism among Oregon's K-12 students. House Bill 2374 is a positive initiative that recognizes the importance of engaging families as valuable partners in the effort to improve student attendance and academic success. Children cannot learn if they are not in school, and parents and guardians have an essential role to play in ensuring children get to school each day, ready to learn.

We know family hardship, including a lack of basic life necessities such as income, housing, health care, and transportation can negatively impact a child's regular attendance at school. These hardships can narrow parental focus and engagement in their child's education.

The CARE Program offers a wholistic, family and community-centered model to assist and empower families to meet their basic needs and address the unique challenges that may impact their child's school attendance. Rather than penalize parents and guardians for their child's truancy, the CARE Program importantly asks, "What can we do to help?"

We know the pandemic worsened student absenteeism across Oregon and districts are trying different initiatives to help students get to school each day.

The CARE Program will complement local district initiatives and provide additional tools and resources within local communities to combat chronic absenteeism by helping families address the problems that impact their child's attendance and learning.

OSBA welcomes the addition of the family and community-centered service model the CARE Program offers to combat chronic absenteeism in Oregon's K-12 schools. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment and House Bill 2374 is a valuable contribution to this important effort.