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To: House Committee on Education  
From: Chris Shank, SchoolWorks Attorney

**Re: Oppose for HB 2052**

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Dobson, Vice-Chair McIntire, and members of the Committee:

Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ), a non-profit public defense provider, has been dedicated exclusively to juvenile law for 50 years. Each year, we provide holistic, client-centered representation to hundreds of children, youth, and parents in Oregon's juvenile court system. Through our advocacy for Oregon's children, youth, and parents, we often see the same systemic problems and we work to change the policies that contribute to these problems.

Youth, Rights & Justice created our SchoolWorks program over twenty years ago after observing through our juvenile court representation of children and youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, the lack of school success and the poor educational outcomes our clients were facing. Since its creation, our SchoolWorks program has provided individual education advocacy in over 3800 cases to help our clients enroll in school, stay in school, succeed, and graduate.

**YRJ opposes HB 2052 because it reinstates a harmful, ineffective practice of punishing families through citations and fines. YRJ urges this committee to support viable solutions to chronic absenteeism such as those found in HB 3199**

There is no doubt that chronic absenteeism is a problem that needs to be addressed.

The COVID pandemic, with the resulting extended periods of remote schooling and quarantines, exacerbated an already serious problem. It disrupted student and family routines. It altered students' perceptions of the importance of school and, most significantly, it disconnected students from their friends, teachers and other caring adults in their school communities.

There are many reasons behind chronic absenteeism. Family demands, unstable housing, unreliable transportation, violence, bullying or harassment at school, and mental health challenges caused by stress and trauma can all be contributing factors. Straddling families already struggling with these issues with additional fines and court proceedings will not get children into their seats in the classroom.

Many studies have looked at the efficacy of punitive approaches to truancy. They discovered that when schools engage in efforts to address the underlying issues behind students' absences, attendance improves. When schools engage in punitive measures, such as those proposed by HB 2052, absences actually increase.

For these reasons, YRJ supports HB 3199. It provides districts with tools and resources to begin to address this crisis. It provides technology and data analysis systems so districts can identify students quickly and connect students and families with resources needed to remove barriers to school attendance. It also gives school districts access to data compiled by ODE on a quarterly basis, so they have the information needed to accurately assess if their systems and supports are working. Finally, it provides for an advisory committee that can distill information for districts and help identify practices that have been successful across the state.

We urge the committee to oppose HB 2052. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

#### Sources:

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The Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Student Success, Wayfinder.

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“Reducing Chronic Absence Requires Problem Solving and Support, Not Blame and Punishment;” Attendance Works, April 4, 2018. <https://www.attendanceworks.org/reducing-chronic-absence-requires-problem-solving-support-not-blame-punishment/>

“Rethinking the Role of the Juvenile Justice System,” The Justice Center Council of State Governments, September 16, 2020. <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/rethinking-the-role-of-the-juvenile-justice-system-improving-youths-school-attendance-and-educational-outcomes/>

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