

Submitter:

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On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB3365

I am writing in support of K–12 climate education in Oregon through House Bill 3365
I am a retired physician who practiced in the State of Oregon from 1996-2022.

I have become increasingly aware of the myriad health consequences which can be attributed either directly or indirectly to climate change. We have watched with disbelief as the rare extreme weather events of the past have become more and more frequent and more severe.

Hurricanes/cyclones have devastated vulnerable coastal populations, causing injuries, deaths, damage to crops, livestock and housing. Extreme heat events have caused melting of glaciers with flooding, landslides, loss of life, homes and livelihoods. Heat waves have also predisposed the start of wildfires which create smoke as well as damaging or destroying homes, businesses and crops. The destruction of stable communities has led to migration of populations hoping to find a better place to live.

On an individual basis, temperature extremes which exceed physiological coping capacity result in dehydration with subsequent organ failure. Heat waves kill people by causing heart attacks, strokes, respiratory failure and heat stroke (when the body loses the ability to maintain a stable temperature and the whole system shuts down).

Sea level rise displaces populations living in coastal areas or adjacent low-lying areas. Recurrent flooding causes damage to roads, housing and sanitation systems. Salination of fresh water renders it no longer suitable for drinking. Farmland that has been repeatedly flooded with salt water is no longer productive with decrease in food yields. These factors create social instability and dissolution of previously stable communities.

Air quality is worsened by higher temperatures as ozone forms more easily from precursors like car exhaust. Asthma incidence and severity has been increasing in areas affected by heat waves.

Water insecurity which often follows drought increases crop failure with subsequent hunger, depression, suicide (especially farmers) and migration of people out of the area. Personal and community hygiene suffers from lack of water with increase in waterborne infectious diseases from contaminated water.

Food insecurity (from decreased food production, decreased yield of crops,

decreased fish populations, changes in the pests and pathogens to crops and livestock)-causes starvation, poor growth in children with permanent decreases in their mental and physical capacities.

Infectious disease patterns are also changing with climate change. Breeding conditions for the vectors of some infectious diseases (like Malaria, Dengue, Zika, tick-borne diseases) can increase their range and thus the frequency of infections. Also, foodborne and waterborne illnesses increase with warmer temperatures on land and in the sea (food poisoning, algal blooms making seafood unsafe to eat, diarrheal illnesses, to name a few).

This is not an exhaustive list of the effects of climate change on health, but it does show that the effects are far-reaching and not good for human health-either as individuals or as populations.

We need to have our students become aware of the challenges that they will face in the present and the future. I am impressed that HB-3365 has been crafted to add this focus on climate change into the already existing classes and programs, rather than making it a separate subject. It will affect every aspect of our lives and well-being. Understanding what is at stake and how we can have the best possible responses to the challenges ahead is a worthy goal. I strongly encourage the passage of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Victoria SkellCerf, MD
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