

Date: February 7, 2026

Subject: In Support of HB 4112

Dear Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of Representative Hudson's bill (HB 4112) to restore \$6 million in Outdoor School funding for 2026. Outdoor School is an amazing legacy in Oregon and one I have had the pleasure of experiencing from a variety of different perspectives over the last 30 years. It is very important to me and my family that this opportunity continues to be available for future generations.

My first experience with Outdoor School was as a 6th grade student at Whitford Middle School. I had spent plenty of time hiking and camping with my family over the years, but there was something unique about living in cabins with my classmates for a week. Experiencing the beauty of the Pacific Northwest while studying soil samples, plant life, and searching for traces of wildlife with my classmates was such an amazing experience that I knew I wanted to return as a counselor. In the fall of my sophomore year, I was able to return to Outdoor School as a counselor named Squirrel and help a new class of 6th graders fall in love with the Outdoor School experience.

It would be nearly two decades before I would be part of the Outdoor School program again. While working as a classified substitute in the Hillsboro School District, I had the opportunity to support students with the Outdoor School curriculum as we returned from the pandemic shutdown. There were no overnights at that time, but Outdoor School organizers and schools worked together to provide the curriculum close to home utilizing local parks and green spaces. We recreated the campfire experience as best we could in these limited environments, sang songs, and performed skits – all within a few miles of our neighborhood schools. Watching the students connect with each other and their counselors after losing a full year of in-person connections was so rewarding. It wasn't the same as the immersive experience in the woods that I had, but I appreciated all the efforts to give these students something after all that they had lost over the previous 2 school years.

Last year, I was able to experience Outdoor School as a parent. My daughter had just transferred schools, and when she got on the bus she had only ever met her classmates online. She came back full of stories about daily hikes and hunting for newts as well as new friendships made throughout the week. It was such a special memory for her!

It is hard to explain Outdoor School to someone who hasn't experienced it firsthand. The word "magical" comes to mind, but that doesn't seem to do it justice. It is transformative. It is a beautiful, equitable, shared opportunity for our students that cannot be replicated in a classroom. For many students, they are away from their parents for the first time, or it is their first significant experience in the great outdoors. As anxiety makes way for curiosity and excitement, students build friendships and an appreciation for nature that is irreplaceable. I would even say it is more important to keep this program funded for our current generation as a much needed break from the digital demands of today's classrooms.

Measure 99 passed the year my son was born, and I was grateful to all the voters and advocates at the time who highlighted the importance of keeping and expanding Outdoor School as part of the educational journey for ALL students in Oregon. My son is 2 years away from attending Outdoor School himself, and passing HB 4112 will restore funding for Outdoor School for 2026 as well as set the tone that this program is worth fighting for to keep it accessible to ALL Oregon students in the future.

Thank you,

Mary Ciula

Outdoor School Participant, Counselor, Support Staff, and Parent