

Hello Chair Hudson, Vice-chair McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Coree Gibson and I work for the Northwest Outdoor Science School (NOSS), a program of Northwest Regional Education Service District. My life is a testament to the enduring impact of this program.

Growing up, I never really did “outdoor” activities with my family. My parents both had full time jobs and part time jobs on the weekends. So going out and exploring the outdoors was not something that was available to me to do. In the spring of 2007, as a sixth grade student from Concord Elementary, Outdoor School was my first real opportunity to connect with nature and “get outside” more than just the walk to and from the bus stop. I had an amazing time getting the hands-on learning experience of the different adaptations of a Ghost Shrimp or a Beaver, real things I could see up close instead of just looking at a picture. I also got to connect with my fellow classmates as well as build friendships with students from another school that attend the same week as me.

From 2010 - 2014, I returned as a student leader, gaining crucial skills in student management and tracking that helped me secure jobs throughout high school and college. During this time I got to spend time outdoors and reconnect with nature and have a way to “unplug” from everyday technology.

From 2018 to 2019 I worked out on site as a Program Leader. I saw firsthand that Outdoor School has so much to offer: a place for students to find belonging, to learn in a new way, and to find a connection with nature. I found a sense of community not only with my coworkers but also with the different students that attend Outdoor School both as sixth graders and student leaders.

In 2019 I moved to our office as a Support Specialist. Outdoor School has survived through the COVID-19 Pandemic, we pivoted to an online version and then were able to move to day trips as restrictions were lifted. While not the full Outdoor School experience we still strived to connect students with nature. When we were able to go back to the overnight experience, both students and teachers were excited to go back to our “traditional” version of Outdoor School.

When people ask me where I work, it is often met with smiles and a story of their own experience of Outdoor School.

In 2016 the Oregonian people (myself included) voted overwhelmingly to pass Ballot Measure 99. This decision ensured that all Oregon Students would get to attend Outdoor School at no cost to them. A crucial equity measure that ended the need for students like my 2007 self to fundraise just to attend. To help ensure that every student in Oregon got a chance to connect to nature (sometimes for the first time) and their community while learning valuable skills.

Today, we are seeing the success of that investment. NOSS has strived to create a program that includes everyone, including students with IEPs, 504s, those who are neurodivergent, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as well as students with a variety of medical conditions. Last year (24-25 school year) , Outdoor School across Oregon actually exceeded pre-pandemic levels of attendance for ALL students, demonstrating its vital importance.

We acknowledge that this is a very difficult budget environment. However, we must stress that Outdoor School has its own funding source via the Oregon Lottery and does not take dollars from K-12 education or social services in the general fund. The very small drop in lottery revenue does not warrant the cuts being imposed.

Outdoor School is a stepping stone for many on their journey through life, providing long lasting effects on people's perspective, communication, and self-understanding. Don't just take my word for it you can watch a 17 minute video ([Where We Belong: An Outdoor School Story](#)), following some students that attend NOSS Spring 2024. By cutting funding, you would be taking away this essential voter- approved experience.

Please support HB 4112, to restore Outdoor School funding for 2026.