

Submitter: Susan Hawes
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4112

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

To be sure, there are so many urgent needs and questions our state is facing right now. The focus of this letter is to urge you to support Representative Hudson's HB 4112 to restore \$6 million in Outdoor School funding.

As a 6th grader I attended Outdoor School in Washington State for a whole week. I loved it! I grew up in a somewhat rural area, but Outdoor School not only gave me confidence outdoors in a way that I hadn't experienced just by being outside on my own; it also nurtured me to become stronger in myself and more independent, while at the same time learning to respect the natural world and build relationships with my peers. I was an Outdoor School camp counselor for all three years of high school, which gave me leadership and social skills that led to jobs in the service industry and later, volunteer coordination and mentoring of youth in an outdoor setting.

I was a decent student, but Outdoor School got me excited about learning in a way that I hadn't been before--I felt alive. Memories of Outdoor School prompted me to study biology and ecology and pursue work in the science field--something I truly hadn't imagined for myself as a girl growing up in the 70s and 80s--and I still work in the field today. (I'm now a site manager of bioswales for the City of Portland.) As an Outdoor School counselor, I saw how kids came alive and thrived in that environment. I'm past 50 and those memories are still strong today!

I urge you to support this funding so that we can continue to offer this experience to kids in our state. Now, more than ever, young students need that opportunity to connect with the natural world in the way that Outdoor School offers; they need that time in nature with their peers and mentors, away from screens and walls, observing the wonder of the world around us. And high schoolers can benefit greatly from the opportunity to be mentors to their younger peers in an outdoor setting: learning leadership skills, social skills, and building confidence in themselves in an environment literally free of walls.

Thank you for considering support of this bill. I feel so strongly about this, that I stayed up late to write this letter!

Sincerely,
Susan Hawes