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Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and honorable members of House Education, I'm Michael Dembrow, retired Senator and former chair of the Senate Education Committee, I'm grateful for this opportunity to speak to you briefly about HB 4050 and the work of the task force that provided the initial work that led to it and answer any questions that you might have.

I had the honor of co-chairing the task force along with your former Committee Chair (and now Senator) Courtney Neron Misslin.

You'll recall that the Joint Task Force on Statewide Educator Salary Schedules, created by 2023's SB and including legislators, teachers, administrators, parents, and advocates, met for a year and examined a variety of ways to attract more Oregonians into the education workforce, both licensed teachers and classified staff, retaining them, and creating more stability in the districts.

In doing so, we also found ourselves confronting a number of challenges revolving around the fact that we have 197 separate collective bargaining processes for teachers and an equal number or more for classified. Ever since the passage of Measure 5 in 1990 and the consequent decision by the Legislature to equalize school funding, nearly all of the money that funds school employee salaries comes from the state. However, salary and benefit decisions are a function of local bargaining and their negotiation processes are generally disconnected from the legislative appropriation process.

Districts and employees settle their contracts and hope that there will be enough money coming from the Legislature to fund them without having to cut programs. Legislators find themselves having to make appropriations decisions without having a clear view of how the dollars are being spent on staff at the local level.

One of the specific charges of the task force was to explore and propose a potential statewide salary schedule for educators. To that end we heard how statewide bargaining works for Oregon's state employees, where an appropriated salary pot becomes the basis for joint negotiations over salary and benefits. We also heard from those involved in statewide bargaining for Oregon's university classified workers.

We heard from two Canadian provinces that have successfully instituted province-wide bargaining around salary and benefits. We heard from Washington, which has a statewide salary schedule.

The task force members could see merits in moving salary and benefits negotiations out of the local setting while retaining local control over the other elements of working conditions, such as hiring, workload, discipline, professional development, etc. We heard from task force members about the way that local bargaining over wages can become very disruptive and polarizing for the school community, especially in small rural districts. We heard from legislators their frustration over the disconnect between local salary decisions and the state appropriations on which they depended.

By the time the taskforce timeline ran out, there was broad agreement that this was a subject that warranted and required further research and conversation. And that's what HB 4050 seeks to do. It directs LPRO to do more granular research into ways in which other states may be aligning state appropriations with local costs more closely. I want to commend Vice-Chair McIntire for bringing this bill to you to keep this work going.

And I'd be happy to answer any questions.