

Submitter: Ley Farmer
On Behalf Of: Students of Oregon
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4112

My name is Leyland Farmer, I'm an Outdoor Educator with Multnomah Education Service District's Outdoor School. I've lived in Oregon my entire life, was a 6th grader who went to ODS, and I was a high school volunteer to the program four separate times. As someone deeply involved in the program, the loss of funding we have suffered this year is substantial. Our program, which serves all of Multnomah County, has had to shorten our program and reduce the amount of sites we run. We are, for this spring, planning on having 5+ classes at each of our 4 different sites every week. However, our staffing hasn't increased. Rather, we have gone DOWN employees, pushing more students into existing sites and give them the same amount of science curriculum with half the time. It is a disservice to our students, to our high school volunteers, to the parents who trust us with their children, and to the schools we serve.

This program is also so incredibly powerful for queer students. As a queer trans adult, I see young trans students get to go by their names for the first time in their lives. I get to see students experiment with their identity, ask questions without fear of judgement, and meet other queer students. It's something I wish I had had when I was in middle school. I was deeply in the closet, unaware that I could be anything other than a sad young girl who hated herself. I now lead my life as a happy queer adult, loved by my peers, getting to show queer children what their lives COULD look like. Its incredibly important for queer students to have a space they can blossom that isn't in a school or at home, two places that traditionally aren't safe spaces for queer students.

This program means so much to everyone it touches. I console kids who are sobbing about having to leave, I get to write references for high schoolers pursuing higher education or careers in education or science. I get to watch teachers see a new side to their students and bond with them in a way you can't recreate in a classroom. I get to see kids who are too afraid to be kids with technology, dance and sing and laugh and be silly and learn. It's really important to me, and I hope it's really important for you too.

I am in support of this proposal. I'm in support of improving student experiences and supporting the natural programs and areas around us. I support educators getting paid enough for the services we provide. I thank you for taking the time to read my support, and I hope that you find science education worth funding.