

Date: February 10, 2026

To: Senate Education

From: Emily McLain, Oregon Education Association

Subject: SB 1555

Testimony in Opposition to SB 1555

Chair Frederick, members of the committee

My name is Emily McLain, and here today representing the Oregon Education Association. OEA represents 44,000 educators across our state who are dedicated to the success of every student.

We are testifying in **Opposition** to Senate Bill 1555. While we appreciate the work of the sponsors to integrate stakeholder feedback via the -2 amendment work and -5 amendments, the proposal continues to move Oregon away from a transparent method of determining school funding and there has not been sufficient time to discuss the key substantive changes where there is not agreement across education representatives. I want to acknowledge that OEA has advocated to updates such as lifting the cap on Special Education weights so we agree there need to be new conversatiois and new ways of doing things in Oregon on education funding.

The -2 and -5 Amendment: Practitioner Voice

OEA specifically thanks the sponsors for the language in the -2 amendment that requires the cost model to be "based on the professional judgment of currently practicing educators" (Amendment -2, Page 1, Line 10-11) "based on the professional judgment of currently practicing educators who represent a variety of roles in the public schools and school districts of this state." (Amendment -5 Page 10-11). By mandating the use of educator panels, the bill correctly acknowledges that those on the front lines are best equipped to identify the resources our students need (Amendment -2, Page 1, Line 14). This is a necessary step, but it does not fix the structural instability created by the rest of the bill.

Remaining Grounds for Opposition

- **-5 amendment moves the the Eight-Year Funding Gap to 6:** Under Section 3(6)(a), of the original bill the fundamental blueprint for what a school needs would only be rebuilt once every eight years (Original Bill, Page 2, Line 31). In the years between,

Commented [EM1]: 8 years down to 6. from OEA feedback according to Sollman.

the state would rely solely on "inflation updates" (Original Bill, Page 3, Line 1). Education is not a static field. Simple inflation adjustments cannot capture the cost of new state mandates, evolving technology, or the qualitative shifts in student mental health needs that we see year over year. This is still a significant change from the 2 year cycle the Quality Education Commission is on.

- **Outsourcing a Public Function:** The bill still requires the state to contract with a "public or private entity" to develop the cost model (Original Bill, Page 2, Line 37). We maintain that the blueprint for Oregon's education funding is a core public policy function of both the legislature and the Governor with their delineated roles. This work must be accountable to Oregonians and should remain under the direct oversight of a public body, not be handed over to a private contractor. We believe this proposed new process still needs to be discussed much more even if educator voices have been added more robustly elsewhere in the bill.
- **Abolishing Independent Oversight of appointed Oregon Education Stakeholders:** SB 1555 removes the Quality Education Commission and replaces it with a third-party contractor working with legislative staff (Original Bill, Page 2, Line 37). While the bill hires an outside entity to build the model, Section 2(3) give the final authority to determine funding "sufficiency" to the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means. This effectively replaces an independent review of a Governor appointed and Senate confirmed commission with a contractor directly reporting to legislative staff. This blurs a line between legislative staff roles and the unique checks created by the appointed commission, department, Governor, and legislature where funding targets risk being driven by what the state finds affordable rather than what research shows students actually need.
- **Redefining Quality as Compliance:** The -2 amendment defines "quality goals" largely as meeting "all state and federal laws" (Amendment -2, Page 1, Line 7). **OEA is deeply concerned that this shifts the goalposts from excellence to the bare minimum.** A school district should not be considered "standard" or "high quality" simply because it is avoiding a legal violation. "Quality" must remain an aspirational standard for student success, including mental health support, small class sizes, and modern technology, not merely a checklist for legal compliance.

A short legislative session is not the venue for a wholesale reimagining of how Oregon meets its constitutional duty to fund schools. While the -2 amendment improves the bill by including educator panels, it does not resolve the risks of privatization or the danger of relying on eight-year-old data to fund our children's future.

I need to respectfully clarify something that was put on the record earlier about this. Its important to note, with due respect, OEA did not participate in a work group. We were invited to two open office hours with one of the sponsors and I was glad I could attend the one on Feb 6th with both sponsors to hear from them. We also heard a lot from legislative staff who have shared a number of their own thoughts. So, though a meeting invitation for the end of January and beginning of February was helpful I need to note for the record that OEA was not a part of any work group and discussion only occurred right as session began.

We remain opposed to SB 1555 and believe more discussion is needed in the interim and 2027 legislative session. OEA shares the passionately shared goals from the Senator and Representative and former Senator Dembrow ensuring students have the support they need to thrive, and that Oregon has a true and accurate picture of the resources needed for educators to successfully support students. OEA's position is not to do work in a way we have always done simply for the sake of continuing the status quo. We agree there need to be discussions about how we assess the resources needed for schools and how we improve the revenue streams this state has to adequately fund schools. Substantive changes that may harm transparency and public input points to the need for more process, discussion and inclusion which are necessary components to excellent public policy making. We need a discussion with all the stakeholders.