

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Muñoz and Scharf, members of the committee, my name is Amber Cooper, and I work for the Oregon Education Association. I am here to speak in support of HB 4011. I have the privilege and honor to work for over 1200 educators and staff in the Greater Albany Public Schools during our recent 22 day strike. I've been involved with negotiating union contracts for 23 years across 4 different states. I've represented workers in higher Ed, clerical, researchers, custodial, tech, bus drivers, nurses, and K-12 teachers. As a kid, I went to the Reynolds School District. One of my High School Teachers told my class of 50 kids we would have desks for everyone after a week or two. He was correct. When kids know there isn't space for them, they know school isn't for them. Half the kids I started school with did not graduate. They aren't here today. I have the responsibility to be here for them.

When I started bargaining contracts for K-12 teachers, **I was surprised to learn that lawmakers in Oregon had singled out this one type of worker and removed the bargaining rights. These rights directly shape working conditions and education quality.** When I represented nurses we could bargain over staffing levels. When I represented higher education workers we bargained over courseloads. When plumbers, clerical staff, social workers, or truck drivers negotiate, they bargain over their workloads. **But teachers cannot at our non-Title schools.**

This is about workload. Workload matters. Making workload negotiable protects both educators and students. Sustainable workloads keep experienced teachers in classrooms. Class size is the primary driver of teacher workload. Your working conditions are student learning conditions. You cannot separate the two.

It is important to note that in Albany the District channels Title 1 kids with special needs into overcrowded and unsafe classrooms in our non-Title schools. Smaller classes mean more individual attention, better relationships, and improved learning conditions. So we needed the **opportunity to bargain for the whole District to have a real voice in how the District uses the resources the state provides.**

We put our proposal on class size on the table and management said they would not discuss a permissive subject of bargaining. Then our contract expired. 150 days passed and they would not bargain class size with us.

Let me be clear about what mandatory bargaining means. Mandatory means discussion must happen. It does not dictate outcomes. Districts still control their budgets. They still make final decisions on resource allocation. Bargaining does not equal automatic agreement. If class size and caseload were mandatory, we could have made progress much earlier. The district could have explained their constraints. We could have proposed solutions. Discussion would have been required.

So, Albany educators went on strike with serious safety, behavior and workload issues that are mandatory subjects and we won a new contract that also has a hard cap on class size for kindergarten and thresholds that trigger additional classroom aids for 1st through 5th grade. There is a five hundred thousand dollar class size fund to hire

additional teachers and aids where they are most necessary. It is the first of its kind in Oregon, and it will not bankrupt our district.

Some will say negotiated class sizes won't reduce class sizes on average. If mandatory bargaining produces no change, why oppose it? The opposition reveals the real fear: bargaining will produce change. Albany proves this. Our class sizes have gone down, we found solutions when required to negotiate.

Not only did we show that negotiating over class size is possible, but also it improves our schools. To determine where those funds need to be prioritized, we negotiated to have a committee of teachers and admin to review the mix of language needs and special education needs of every class, in every school. Our bargaining team gathered info from other districts and learned that negotiating to pay educators extra stipends for teaching overcrowded classrooms was failing to reduce class sizes, so we didn't push for overage stipends. **We got creative and do what educators do best when given a voice in our workplaces: we found better solutions.**

Districts already redirect resources constantly. They make trade-offs between programs, staff, and materials. The difference: educators would have a voice in those trade-offs when it comes to assessing resources. We proved that educator input leads to better decisions.

Teachers leave the profession due to unsustainable workloads. High turnover costs districts millions in recruitment, hiring, and training. Reducing class sizes reduces turnover costs. Albany invested in solutions that will keep teachers in our classrooms. That saves money over time.

If we had been able to negotiate class size from day 1, we might have avoided the heart ache and struggle our community experienced out in the rain last school year. We must trust educators and their first-hand knowledge to have a real say in their workplaces. I urge you to support HB 4011-1