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April 22, 2021

Senate President Peter Courtney and Speaker of the House Tina Kotek
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE, S-201
Salem, Oregon 97301

As we write this, the Joint Ways and Means Committee is preparing to take testimony on Senate Bill 5555 a few hours from now from residents of Rep. Peter DeFazio's district, encompassing much of southwest Oregon. This is the fourth of five planned "road show" hearings, which by definition are designed to hear from Oregon residents about how the state's budget plans will affect their lives and livelihoods.

Allowing the public a voice is a foundation of democracy. Perhaps you can imagine our surprise, and frustration, to discover that the three co-chairs have proclaimed that they will not allow school board members to testify on the budget. This forced silencing of locally elected board members has been in place since the second hearing. It is not only unprecedented – it is simply outrageous.

The state's K-12 public schools represent the single biggest segment of Oregon's budget. Schools are Oregon's largest employer. The future of more than 560,000 students – taken together, a city the size of Salem, Eugene, Gresham and Hillsboro – rests in the hands of this legislative committee.

Turning a deaf ear to the needs of our students runs contrary to democracy and is out of step with Oregon principles. The more than 1,400 school board members of our state are attuned to our communities. They are best positioned to help lead our students out of a pandemic that has shuttered our schools and undermined the educational progress of our young people.

Our board members have a fundamental disagreement with the co-chairs over the amount necessary to keep the State School Fund at current service levels. The amount we are apart in our calculations – \$500 million – translates to thousands of potential staff cuts, dozens of lost teaching hours and learning setbacks for students. The co-chairs evidently do not want to hear that, but it is the truth.

We are committed to advocating for students as our schools and communities recover from the pandemic. Our members' communities elected them to serve as their voice. Attempting to silence this voice is simply shameful.

Sincerely,



Jim Green
Executive Director



Maureen Wolf
President

CC: Rep. Dan Rayfield
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