



To: House Committee on Education

From: Patrick O'Herron, MD

Date: 3/21/2017

Re: Support for House Bill 2693

Chair Dorothy and committee members,

As the board president of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility I, on behalf of our membership, respectfully urge your support for House Bill 2693, which would establish a program under which Department of Education awards grants to school districts for percentage of certain student transportation costs.

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility is committed to tackling the greatest threats to public health, one of which is climate change. We advocate for policy that reduces carbon pollution and have found that many such policies have societal and health co-benefits. Improving youth access to public transportation is a great example of smart climate policy with major co-benefits for health and social justice.

The benefits for students of better access to public transportation is clear: it presents opportunities and opens doors to after school activities, sports, tutoring, and job opportunities. It gives students better and easier access to school helping address tardiness, absenteeism, and ultimately improves graduation rates.

I would like to point out a few specific public health benefits that come with increased use of mass transit:

Studies show that users of mass transit incorporate large amounts of active transportation into their trips (i.e. walking or riding a bike to catch the bus). We are currently in the midst of a public health crisis of childhood obesity and related diseases like diabetes. The more active kids are the healthier they tend to be.

Taking the bus is a lot safer than driving. Data show that a passenger on a city bus is 60 times less likely to die in a traffic accident than an automobile driver (National Highway Transportation Safety Administration data from 2000-2009). An analysis of 29 years of traffic data for 100 US cities which was completed in 2014 showed that cities with high transit use had ½ the rate of traffic fatalities compared to cities with low transit use. A very important note is that this data in on all drivers, and lets face it (and

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actuarial statistics back this up) high school students are terrible drivers. Especially in this era of distracted driving (and the previous data on traffic fatalities lag behind the current trend/epidemic of texting and driving.)

Mass transit moves people in a low-carbon manner and we need as many low-carbon solutions as possible to reduce overall emissions to address the massive public health threats of human-induced climate change. A youth transit pass sets young people up with the tools and experience to become lifelong transit users.

For these reasons Oregon PSR urges your support of HB 2693. With its passage, we can provide our young people with more opportunity to succeed with the most help going to those who need it most. We can incorporate some physical activity into the daily routine of our young transit riders. We can make the roads safer for everyone, especially our kids. And we can improve and support mass transit as part of healthy, efficient, low-carbon communities.

Thank you very much,



Patrick O'Herron, MD, FACS

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