



Children's Scholarship Fund

Oregon

Testimony in Favor of SB 437
The Educational Opportunity Act: "The Power of Choice"
Kathryn Hickok
Director, Children's Scholarship Fund-Oregon

June 13, 2017

Dear Chairman Roblan and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Kathryn Hickok, and I am director of the Children's Scholarship Fund-Oregon. For almost twenty years our nonprofit program has provided privately funded partial-tuition elementary scholarships to children from lower-income Oregon families. As CSF-Portland, we originally served Washington, Multnomah, and Clackamas counties. Our program area now includes the entire state of Oregon. We are currently sponsoring students from Beaverton to Bend and Albany to Medford.

The Children's Scholarship Fund-Oregon is a permanent program of Cascade Policy Institute and part of the Children's Scholarship Fund national network of scholarship granting organizations (www.scholarshipfund.org). CSF and its partner programs are committed to empowering families in need with the ability to choose the K-8 schools that best meet their children's needs, regardless of their ability to pay or the neighborhoods where they live. To be eligible for a scholarship, families must demonstrate financial need according to standards similar to the Federal free and reduced price lunch program. Our scholarships are financed through the generosity of local Oregon donors and matching grants from the national Children's Scholarship Fund.

Our experience with the educational choices made by the lower-income Oregon families participating in our program demonstrates several key points relevant to this bill:

First, lower-income parents want to take charge of their children's futures through educational opportunity; and when they are given a real choice, they do so. While their financial means are limited, our parents are knowledgeable about their options and determined to make any sacrifice to raise their children to be well-educated, responsible, and successful adults. Parents in our program value high-quality education as the way out of poverty for their children and make the commitment and sacrifice of paying a substantial portion of their tuition themselves.

Second, demand for broader educational opportunities in Oregon is real. When our program began in 1999, the parents of more than 6,000 children applied for only 550 available scholarships. Weekly, parents call and email me because they want to find the right educational

fit for their children. It could be a specialized program or school tailored to their learning or physical needs, or they could be looking for educational opportunities not available in the public school assigned to them by their home address. Senate Bill 437 would give Oregon families greater power to choose among the broad range of educational choices and learning opportunities currently available, or available in the future, using money the state already allocates for their children's education.

Third, it does not take a lot of money to change a child's life. Our scholarships average about \$1,500. That small amount can make the difference in allowing children to attend schools they love, that motivate them to do their best, and that foster their individual talents. Education Savings Accounts would make an even greater, empowering difference for parents in where they send their children to school and how they tailor their kids' entire educational experience to their unique needs and talents.

The benefits of an Education Savings Account program for Oregon families are not theoretical for us. As a charitable scholarship program, CSF-Oregon helps parents to choose the schools best suited to their children's needs. This bill extends educational options to more children in our communities. It will make a real and immediate difference in thousands of lives, just when they need it the most.

Respectfully,



Kathryn Hickok

Director

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