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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan Introducing LD 278, "An Act To Establish a Process for the Consideration and Implementation of Changes to Mandated Instruction or Training for Students"  
February 17, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Daughtry and fellow members of the Education and Cultural affairs Committee. I am Michael Brennan and I represent District 36 which is part of Portland. I am pleased to present LD 278, "An Act To Establish a Process for the Consideration and Implementation of Changes to Mandated Instruction or Training for Students" for your consideration.

This bill was brought before the committee last year, and actually passed both chambers, but it was lost in the shuffle when the Legislature adjourned last year. Let me lay out the issue it seeks to resolve.

I want to start with a scenario that is familiar to many of you. A bill comes before this committee to mandate teaching a given subject. We vote against the bill because we know that subject is taught either as a discrete course or it is covered in K-12 each year teaching a part of the curriculum. This information, of course, is invisible to someone outside the school system. Then we get criticized for voting against teaching that subject.

Also, we know that the school day has not been expanded by one minute nor the school year by a single day. We know that we cannot keep stuffing more things into the curriculum without losing aspects like art and music and recess. It just isn't possible. Plus, with all due respect, we are not experts in curriculum.

Therefore, the bill proposes that when this committee receives a bill proposing mandated curriculum it will hold public hearing. Then it can either endorse the curriculum, vote it down or send it out to review by the Department of Education. The Department will then send it to a subcommittee of teachers, administrators and experts in the subject matter. They would determine if it is already taught, the value of teaching it and, if valuable, the structure needed to be put in place to prepare teachers to teach it. The subcommittee would then give their recommendation to the DOE who would forward it to our committee. We would follow up on their recommendation.

I know I would feel a lot more comfortable voting for or against the mandated curriculum bill based on the subcommittee's recommendation.

All of us understand the value of a well-rounded education for our students. Creating a curriculum that prepares our students for the workforce and the world is critical. That being said, we need to make sure that we are carefully evaluating curriculum additions, so that we are not adding excessive requirements to our already overburdened educators.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill.