

Oregon Student Association



SB 576: Kaylee's Law

Dear members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Rowan Mathews and I use they/them/theirs pronouns. I am a current Central Oregon Community College student and the Director of Legislative Affairs on campus for the 2018-2019 school year. I'm here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 576, also known as Kaylee's Law.

I am a Central Oregonian born and raised, and this horror, the complete exploitation of Kaylee Sawyer at the hands of a Campus Public Safety officer, was my first interaction with COCC. My junior year of high school was plastered with missing persons posters, and I watched, alongside my town, as the updates on the investigation and the absolute devastation of what happened to Kaylee Sawyer emerged. *And without SB 576, there's no guarantee it won't happen again.*

In my work as an official with COCC's student government, I have listened as students and faculty alike describe how they were ordered to provide licenses and registration during traffic stops by Campus Public Safety, not police. Even with our emergency call boxes on campus, students fear the danger they may summon when reaching out for help, more than the danger they would be facing. Like my peers and many of our faculty, I fear walking anywhere on campus at night. Until now, I have declined to take any late night classes for concern of my personal safety. Now, at the end of my associates degree, I no longer have that luxury. I will be in classes until 10:00 pm this coming term. I must choose between delaying my education, and thus my career, or putting myself in potential danger. We, as students and faculty, have to plan on protecting ourselves from anyone, including those *who are charged with protecting us.*

Last year, I helped to bring eighteen Central Oregon students to the Oregon Students of Color Conference at Western Oregon University. During this trip, two of my students were accidentally locked out of their rooms, and had contacted WOU's Campus Public Safety department. Because what happened on my campus, I felt concerned and guilty, astutely aware that what happened at COCC could happen anywhere, even at Western. I had left two of my students at night, by themselves, with someone who could be a danger to them. What *could* happen because of what *has* happened, flashed through my mind. I was on the phone with them the entire interaction so as to provide some sort of comfort and a semblance of safety, and if absolutely nothing else, I could be a witness.

CPS Officers are just people, of course. But their positions come with power, responsibility, and currently, unchecked opportunity to do harm. Unchecked by

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legislation, incidents of abuse of power by public safety departments occur far and wide, and often go unreported to local law enforcement agencies. Just on my campus, we have had serial stalkings and sexual harassment incidents go unreported to local police, while intimidation tactics are freely exercised on students. I can't imagine mine is the only campus with these issues nor, without legislation, there are no checks to keep this power in balance.

This is an institutional issue. A lack of accountability, background checks, and an apparent lack of articulation that they are charged with the *protection and safety* of students, not playing police officers, has caused this. Sometimes, we have people in CPS who push for positive change and training. But we can't rely on our Board of Directors to make the changes needed to protect students. We need accountability. We need protection. We need people who can be responsible with our safety, not people we are forced to protect ourselves against.

With this in mind, can we count on you to keep the students on our campuses safe by voting yes on SB 576?

Thank you for your time.

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