

To Chair Williamson, Vice-Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Ella Meloy, I am a senior at Lincoln High School in Portland, Oregon. I've gone to school in Portland my whole life and I do advocacy work surrounding education and ending sexual violence. I am writing in support of HB 3077. This bill would be an update to the reporting and investigation processes surrounding sexual harassment in schools in Oregon. This bill is extremely important as it would create safer school environments for students and staff.

With the recent #MeToo movement, more and more social and political processes surrounding sexual harassment have been reexamined and updated, I believe Oregon's school policies surrounding sexual harassment need to be updated as well. Often times harassment reports get brushed under the rug because it is seen as an over exaggeration when it needs to be taken seriously whether it is between students, staff and students, or staff. This policy would provide that reports about sexual harassment be investigated whether on school grounds or not if the occurrence made an hostile environment at school and school events. This is important because our schools should feel like a safe place from trauma.

I know that it is hard to learn and participate in class while being in the same room with the perpetrator. Without the proper ways to get help and report harassment, classrooms that are supposed to feel safe can feel uncomfortable, agonizing and traumatic. Knowing that your harasser is not facing consequences for their actions feels horrible and diminishes the extent of the crime, having to constantly be in the same classrooms with them is worse. Even if the harassment does not happen in a classroom, harassment that takes place outside of school still has lasting effects in the school environment, especially when the survivor and perpetrator attend the same classes, school events, and have the same community.

In high school, we learn more than just the curriculum. We learn how to act like adults, we learn the standards and norms of society and we learn to mature emotionally and mentally to understand the world we live in. What we learn now as students lasts into the future. If the standards are that sexual harassment is not tolerated, and treated with consequences and an investigation, this standard will continue to follow my generation into the workforce and through to when we start to raise our own children.

As of now in schools, this is not the case. Starting in middle school, there was a trend of male students touching the butts of female students while we were walking down the hallway to class. This was harassment, but as middle school students we were taught that is just a part of growing up. Continuing into high school, harassment manifests in different ways. Sexual harassment should not be thought of as so typical and regular that it is labelled as a part of growing up. Sexual harassment in schools is normalized, and this change in the reporting process and investigation would help to break that norm.

We need your help. I hope that the House Committee on Judiciary approves HB 3077 and update our school policies so that our standards around sexual harassment continue to change for the better.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ella Meloy