



March 10, 2021

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Oregon, we express our support for Senate Bill 683.

If we are ever going to near the goal of anti-racism, we must walk a path of learning and re-learning. We also cannot amble along this path but must walk forward with serious intent and a willingness to get back onto the path if we stray. This means we must look squarely at the history of racism in the United States, and not simply speak in generalities or point the finger of blame elsewhere.

A critical step in the process of self, historical, and cultural examination regarding racism is to ensure that the next generation does not repeat the errors and sins of our past. Illuminating our history of racism, coupled with concepts of restorative justice, can provide the groundwork for positive transformation. Restorative justice emphasizes accountability, collaboration, making amends and giving all community members a voice.¹

We have heard the argument that the topic of race is too challenging, or even inappropriate, for young people to learn about. We strongly disagree. The study of history is always full of wars, insurrections and oppression. It is difficult to see why the history of racism should be singled out for exclusion from curricula on these grounds. Our history of racism is not one we might not wish to teach, must less admit, but we must do so.

By failing to address the topic racism in the United States, we will be implicitly condoning it. Young people are particularly adept at ferreting out the "real" truth or seeing the fallacies of "do as I say and not as I do." We need to ensure that our words and actions walk together.

Another important factor regarding this issue is that students cannot be successful unless their learning environments are perceived by all students to be safe places where they belong. Unfortunately, children of color often face very real barriers to achieving this maxim. Racial inequity is baked into our nation's educational system. For example: teachers asked to rate students' academic abilities scored black children far below white peers with identical scores; candidates of color are often overlooked for entrance into gifted and talented programs; disciplinary policies fall hardest on children of color. Black kids are often seen as troublemakers.²

¹ Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, <http://restorativejustice.org/> - sthash.fLf8WDum.dpbs

² Hannah Furfaro, *To Understand Structural Racism, Look to Our Schools*, Seattle Times, 28 June 2020.

Refraining from directly confronting the issue of race will only reinforce these attitudes. Affirmatively and openly bringing it into our schools' curricula can equip all students with the skills, knowledge and capacity to break the status quo.³

We urge your support of Senate Bill 683.

Respectfully,

Trish Garner, J.D., M.S.W.
State Public Policy Chair,
American Association of University Women of Oregon
garner37@mac.com

³ Jill Anderson, *Addressing Racial Inequity in Curriculum and School Culture*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 29 August 2014; Cristina Quinn, *Dismantling Systemic Racism Starts in Schools, Educators Say*, GBH, 6 August 2020.