

Chair Senator Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, Members of the Committee, my name is Tricia Brand and I serve as Chief Diversity Officer at Portland Community College. In my professional role as well as my personal engagement in the community, I support racial and social justice policies that hope to remedy barriers to social equality in long-standing and sustainable ways. This is why I support SB 683.

For many years, Oregon has missed a critical opportunity to reconcile its exclusionary history and relationship to numerous longstanding policies, practices, protections, and narratives that are rooted in racially hierarchical ideas. These ideas that have led to socio-cultural, economic, political, and health disparities are on full display as we have struggled mightily in the converging pandemics of COVID-19, systemic racism, environmental crisis, and deep economic and political divides in our society.

The lack of accurate and complete training, curricula, and discussion are contributing to the persistent equity and opportunity gaps among Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) in our education system, and it is a significant social determinant of health as evidenced in the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BIPOC communities.

As an educator, leader, and public servant in higher education, I believe in a quality education for all who seek it and to make higher education more equitable and just necessitates continued engagement with the ways in which our current systems and practices are inequitable.

Instruction under SB 683 can and should be coordinated with instruction under the Ethnic Studies, Inclusive Education, and Holocaust Bills, so that the Black Experience is presented in a holistic and unified manner and demonstrates threads to all the justice movements we hold dear as critical to vitality of Oregon for generations to come.

Our state legislature (through HB 2864) now requires Oregon's public colleges to meet standards of cultural competency, which is a significant achievement and critical step toward addressing root causes of lingering prejudicial thoughts and violent resistance to each step we take as a community toward a more racially just society. As a nation, we need strong policy and support to resolutely relinquish the denial of racism and systems of oppression. Instruction under SB 683 is only effective if it is done statewide, so all Oregonians learn this important history and develop anti-racism skills

While social justice and anti-racist work can be difficult and uncomfortable (as learning often is), we believe that authentic and meaningful equity work comes from a place of compassion and commitment to community. Indeed, blame, shame, guilt, and denial are barriers to authentic anti-racist praxis. The very foundation of our approach to equity and inclusion is the commitment to creating the conditions for every student to be successful; this requires analysis of the circumstances our students face that are systemic.

I assert an unwavering commitment to SB 683. Now is the time to enact SB 683, while public opinion and elected leaders strongly support racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, for everyone.

Sincerely,

Tricia D. Brand
Portland, Oregon