

Chair Teresa Alonso Leon

House Committee on Education

900 Court Street NE, H-295

Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Williamson and members of the committee:

I am writing to express my support of HB 2052, which will “Require school districts to allow students to wear Native American items of cultural significance at public school events, including high school graduation.” For Indigenous people graduation is one of the many celebrations our community honors as a whole and like many celebrations, our culture guides it.

According to the Oregon Department of Education, Native American/ Alaskan Native students have graduated on average at 60.6%, which is the lowest in our state. This data comes from a four year cohort graduation trend that started to be collected in 2010- present time. It takes a whole community to get a student through an education system that was not built for us to succeed.

With passing this bill, Oregon will continue to build trust with Indigenous constituents. Since post- colonial times, our culture, language and traditions have been taken from us and we were forced to assimilate. This bill is directly decolonizing the educational system and standing with Indigenous people as we fight for our basic human right. When the state of Oregon passes this legislation it will also gain national publicity through Indian Country and allow other state’s to follow our lead.

In my Ichishkin language which is from the Warm Springs people, there is a saying that goes “Axwai na wa chna”, and it means “we are still here.” Please stand with Indigenous people as we continue to decolonize the barriers that continue to harm our very existence. Thank you for your support for Indigenous communities across Oregon.

Sincerely,

Amanda Squiemphen-Yazzie

Community Advocate from East Portland/Gresham area

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