

Testimony in Support of HB 2052
Senate Education Committee

April 21, 2021

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thomsen, and members of the committee, I am Renae Guenther and I am a member of the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians, one of Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes. I am writing to support the passing 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". This bill supports Indigenous student's right to express their cultural identity, religious and traditional practices during a ceremony that demonstrates their survivance and achievements during their education.

In my experience as a Tribal Family Advocate on the Tribal Attendance Promising Practices, I have had students and parents come to me out of uncertainty and fear of repercussions for students wearing culturally significant items such as stoles and eagle feathers during graduation. High school graduation should be a time where Indigenous students are honored for their hard work and achievement, especially given that Native students are less likely to graduate from an educational institution that was designed to strip us of our Native identities and culture. Indigenous students should not have to be apprehensive about showing up as their whole and authentic selves during a time of celebration. Moreover, they should not be told by school or district administrators that they are not allowed to wear items of cultural significance during graduation ceremonies. Doing so threatens educational equity and maintains educational assimilation.

As a mother of two young Native American boys, I only hope that they will not have to endure the educational policy attacks on their cultural identify that are all too prevalent still today. House Bill 2052 is a long over-due and a necessary step towards requiring schools to recognize and validate student's Indigenous cultural identities. I urge you to support the passing of HB 2052. Thank you for this time and opportunity.

Respectfully,

Renae Guenther
Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians
Tribal Attendance Promising Practices
South Umpqua School District