



February 23, 2021

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chairs Neron and Weber, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Oregon, we express our support for House Bill 2697. We also suggest that some changes be made in the definition of protected classes.

It is challenging to appreciate the harm that can be done when hate is expressed and harassing actions are undertaken.

As a personal matter, I can still remember being the only girl in 3rd grade. My only friend was Jewish, and we both suffered in an environment where expressions of hate and exclusion were everyday occurrences. Teachers and school staff simply looked the other way. The fact that I can remember these taunts several decades later attests to the fact that one can never quite erase the erosion of self-value that ensued.

It is time that the "adults in the room" take responsibility to instill in young people the proposition that expression of hate and committing discriminatory, harassing actions are just plain wrong.

It is time that action is taken to quell the "us versus them" mentality that can pervade our culture, and this message should be loud and clear. Young people in particular are keenly aware that nonverbal communications outweigh verbal communications, and while adults may say they don't permit discrimination or harassment, young people perceive the fallacy of these claims when symbols of hate are condoned in our schools and other public areas.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS:

We do respectfully suggest that the following be added to the list of protected classes:

(1) "Gender." It hardly bears citation to suggest that gender harassment is a problem area for our schools and school buses.

(2) "Weight." It is unfortunately the case that "fat shaming" has become a serious area of concern.¹

Respectfully Submitted,

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¹ *The Scarlet F*, Harvard Public Health, Spring 2017; *The Terrors of Middle School Body Harassment*, <https://more-love.org/2019/01/23/the-terrors-of-middle-school-body-harassment-and-how-to-help-your-child-navigate-body-shaming/>