

Good afternoon, Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chairs Neron and Weber, and Members of the House Education Committee. For the record, my name is Raymond Arias and I am here today as an alum of the Oregon Association of Student Councils and a supporter of House Bill 4099.

For almost two years, youth across the state have suffered through the repercussions of the pandemic. For me, repercussions meant taking a gap year upon my high school graduation last summer before going to college to help financially support my family; however, for my neurodivergent five-year-old brother and many other Oregon youth, repercussions have meant devastating levels of learning loss and stunted social and emotional development. Healing the wounds COVID-19 has inflicted on students across the state has proven to be a taxing endeavor now that in-person school has resumed. The needs and demands youth have during this time for supports are high, but the supply is insufficient. The Racial Equity & Justice Youth Collaborative, as illustrated in HB 4099, enables Oregon youth to have a chance at what they so desperately need and desire at this moment: recovery.

Through the inclusivity of varying geographic and social perspectives, the Racial Equity and Justice Youth Collaborative would serve as a platform for

Oregon youth to develop and recommend policies conducive to their rehabilitation and success in a post-pandemic schooling system. By investing in youth with the vast resources and mentor opportunities the collaborative guarantees, our state will allow youth to solidify regional networks, paving the pathway for the growth of student leadership and advocacy across our state in even the most rural areas.

During the 2021 Legislative Session, this committee voted to pass the collaborative with bipartisan and unanimous support. This session, with minimal changes to the very same collaborative, I hope this committee can work together to repeat that feat to assist in the recovery and prosperity of not only my former peers around the state, some of which you have heard testimony from today, but also the next generation of Oregon youth that includes my little brother. Thank you again for your time, service, and the opportunity to testify today. I urge you to vote yes on HB 4099.