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Colt Gill

Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction

HB 4031: Adding ODE to the Educator Equity Act
Senate Education Committee
February 22, 2022

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Colt Gill and I am the Director for the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4031, which will add ODE to the list of entities that must adhere to the Educator Equity Act, which asks that “the percentage of diverse educators employed by a school district or an education service district reflects the percentage of diverse students in the public schools of this state or the percentage of diverse students in the district.”

I have instituted three hiring principles at ODE. The first of the principles is “Employee diversity is a critical asset needed to meet our goals.” Thus, we as an agency have been working on meeting the goals in the Educator Equity Act, but only on my direction - not because we are compelled by statute to meet a statewide goal.

Three years ago, about 16% of ODE’s staff identified as people of color. At the last formal review since implementation of our hiring principles, we are at 21.3% staff of color. Our executive leadership team (E-Team) includes 40% people of color (and 73% women). While ODE is outpacing the diversification of the statewide educator workforce (about double the percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse teachers in Oregon), we still have a long way to go to meet the goal the state has set for school districts and ESDs, as currently 40% of our students are students of color. We have made significant progress, but again - only at my direction.

In new hiring, ODE is holding our agency to this goal. Some of you may want to know, “Why is this statutory change necessary? What makes it so important?”

The studies on it bear out the importance of diversity in the education of our students. Research has shown that all students benefit from having teachers of color. All students, regardless of race, report feeling cared for and academically challenged by teachers of color, according to a Learning Policy Institute report. The Learning Policy Institute has also found that when taught by teachers of color, students of color in particular have better academic performance, improved graduation rates, and are more likely to attend college. We know in Oregon our systems have created opportunity gaps for students of color.

We believe that our students greatly benefit from seeing people who may have similar experiences to them represented in the educational space, and the research demonstrates

there is a powerful connection to engagement in the classroom. We believe there can also be a similar impact on the space we hold as the agency responsible for K-12 education in the state.

Our simple ask of the Committee - ODE is the state of Oregon's education agency. It is the one controlled by the state. It is the one that administers nearly every education program offered in Oregon, it distributes more than half of the state's general fund, it works with the State Board of Education to set policy that holds our schools accountable. The agency does not currently reflect the population it serves.

The Oregon Department of Education would do better serving today's diverse student body (which is more diverse than the adult population in Oregon) if our staff and leadership better reflected the racial and ethnic demographics of the students we serve. We cannot institute good policy if we do not have leadership and staff who deeply understand the lived experiences of our students.

We want ODE's current hiring practices and goals to be enshrined in law, as it is for schools and ESDs. We ask that you support adding ODE to the Educator Equity Act and hold us to the same aspiration that we hold our schools to.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments, and we welcome any questions you may have. We urge your support of HB 4031.

Respectfully submitted,

Colt Gill

Director