

Submitter: Makerusa Porotesano
On Behalf Of: the Pacific Islander Student Alliance
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB3144

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Makerusa Porotesano (he/him), I am the Director of Multicultural Services at Portland Community College. I live in North Portland and where I was born, raised and schooled & I support HB3144 for Pacific Islander Student Success.

When my family migrated to Oregon in the late 60's/ early 70's, their goal was to receive an education that the islands of American Samoa could not provide, a college degree.

While American Samoa could not provide a college education, it did provide a priceless resource that Oregon was not yet ready to provide my generation. History, Language, cultural identity/services and a strong sense of belonging. Our home islands provide these services and unfortunately a lot of youth in the Oregon diaspora lack these basic needs.

As an educator now, I've seen the constant flow of Pacific Islander students and while I might be closer in age of their parents, my educational experience is more related to theirs because students born or raised in Oregon (or most of the US) have a uniquely different experience than that of their parents and/or those who migrated here later in life.

Like a lot of my students I learned early that I was different and unknown. A scar on my eye is a constant reminder of what my neighbors thought I was worth when I was run over by a bike at the age of three and told to go back to where I'm from. I was placed in ethnic groups at school that I didn't belong to based on the color of my skin and texture of my hair. I was often assigned to spaces with Asian, Latinx and Black students.

After High School I knew my only chance to gain access to Pacific Islander services was to move to Samoa and I did for 5 years, I left Oregon and became a new version of myself. However, It wasn't enough because when I came back, Oregon was still the same.

In 2007, fed up with the lack of resources and representation I created the Pacific Islander Student Alliance (or PISA). And in 2010 we hosted our first PISA conference, it would be the first of many and this year on March 24th-26th we gather again to celebrate this conference. Since 2010, this conference has been the only

Higher Ed/Post Secondary Pacific Islander educational student program in Oregon and for a lot of our students, the first time they saw themselves in our education system.

I left Oregon again in 2010, for the same reason I left in 2000. However, when I returned in 2016, I returned with a family. So today, I want to make sure that my child can come live in Oregon with me and still land "in ocean." A place where her values are reflected with the resources needed for successful navigation.

Truth be told, I don't want to leave anymore. I want to live in an Oregon where our people are seen and for the first time we have legislation that can help make that happen. As we grow resources for our marginalized communities, I would hope that our people are included too. Leaving shouldn't be the answer, staying and growing is a solution we all deserve.

I ask you, help PISA, help our families and help make Oregon the home we deserve.
Pass HB3314

I say these things with all the love and respect an ocean can carry.

Makerusa Porotesano
Director of Multicultural Services at Portland Community College
Co-Founder of the Men of Color Leadership Program (at PCC)
Founder of the Pacific Islander Student Alliance