



February 28, 2023

TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Our Children's Oregon, Children's Agenda
RE: Support for SB 421

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee

Our Children Oregon (OCO) is a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. The Children's Agenda, convened by OCO, brings together ~127 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the well-being of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our collective created a 2023 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families.

Our youth in Oregon learn best when they feel safe, seen, heard, and valued. It is a critical time to start listening to the voices of youth and let them teach us. Youth in Oregon are experiencing a world we could never imagine, and it is critical for us to bring forward their voices, experiences, and needs. Collaboration is essential not only for youth to be the drivers and decision-makers of policies, but also to center and recognize the diversity of Oregon's youth population. According to OCO's KIDS Count Data Cards, Oregon is becoming more diverse—23,000 youth identify as LGBTQIA+, 79,700 youth with disabilities, 156,600 youth of immigrant parents, and 289,800 youth of color.¹

We strongly support SB 421, the Youth Collaborative, as it will prioritize youth voices from historically and currently marginalized and underserved communities. Today, Oregon lacks a youth majority-led advisory body that assists in policy-making based directly on their experiences. SB 421 creates a process for youth leaders to convert their wisdom and experiences into policy-making at the state level. The Youth Collaborative will help break the historic exclusion of students of color, LGBTQ2SIA+ students, emerging bilingual students, and students with disabilities seeking racial equity and justice. By including and supporting diverse youth leaders, they will positively impact the lives of Oregon's youth today, tomorrow, and beyond.

¹ <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/publications/oregon-kids-count/>

We urge you to take into further consideration the youth collaboration as diverse youth leaders are essential to our future. We are counting on your support for SB 421 to elevate diverse youth leaders, integrate their perspectives, and share their stories.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Greer Klepacki, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator

Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

View the 2023 Children's Agenda at www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda