

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Ji Reichle, I am a graduate of Lake Oswego Senior High School and a first year student at The George Washington University.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 421 for numerous reasons, which can best be explained through my own lived experiences as a member of Oregon's youth.

Throughout my high school experience I was the epitome of a "leadership kid" and because of this desire to represent my school and give back to it, I was incredibly fortunate to learn about opportunities within organizations like the Oregon Association of Student Councils (OASC). My connection to OASC, led me to join the team advocating for this Youth Collaborative, something I am very proud to have been a part of and continue to advocate for even being outside the state. Being in these leadership roles have been some of the best parts of my life.

The things I call my accomplishments were not made or received without dedication, hard work, connections, and most importantly a strong support system. I am grateful to have a support system of teachers, peers, and mentors who to this day encourage me to invest my time in opportunities so that I can be a part of things I believe in and make an impact on. I want to make sure everyone who wants to has the means to gain experience and opportunities like I have. I know that within our generation there are many who not only want these opportunities but would excel in them, however they don't know how it could be possible. SB 421 can make it possible, because this bill works to eliminate barriers many members of the youth run into, such as providing mentors so the students feel safe and comfortable, or figuring out ways around technology issues in this ever technologically progressing world. The goal should be to create a support system that meets its students in the middle by equipping them with the physical and mental resources to succeed.

This bill allows students and youth alike to make the changes they want to see without having to worry about anything other than that change. By working to meet students where they are at, we are giving them the capability to not only address the problems they are facing in their everyday life but to improve our state for future generations to come. This bill not only provides an avenue for students to better inform policies that are put in place and directly affect them but allows them to become empowered by their own actions.

Furthermore, I believe it is not only vital but our responsibility to establish a Youth Collaborative to ensure an accurate representation of our state. One of the many things this collaborative will work on is to advise the state on how to create and support regional student leadership networks, especially for historically underrepresented and underserved students. To do

this work requires first hand knowledge that will be incredibly valuable when making decisions to truly address the issues and solve them.

This representation is extremely important and will be ensured in this bill as it considers both geographical diversity and racial diversity. This issue of representation and historically having a lack of representation is something that resonates with me, because when you are one of two, maybe three, or the only person of color in the room, you become saddled with responsibility, to do no wrong, to speak for an entire group of people who have experienced wildly different ways of life, and find out whether or not you will be respected and heard the same as the rest of your colleagues. By having a Youth Collaborative, we can account for the diverse experience of members across our state and begin to build a better future.

In creating this collaborative, we can begin to rebuild and shape a system that for far too long has let its youth down, something myself and my peers have found throughout our years in school. Passing this bill invests in the chance for youth to reach their fullest potential, something that is often a luxury to few but should be available to all.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read my letter. I once again urge you to adopt SB 421 because in adopting this bill, you are supporting our students and in turn the future of our state as it will inevitably land in the hands of these students.