



March 1, 2023

Senate Committee on Education
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 421

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 27,000 members statewide.

The ACLU of Oregon strongly supports Senate Bill 421, which would create a state-level majority youth-led, Racial Equity and Justice Youth Collaborative at the Oregon Department of Education. This would effectively support youth-leaders across the state in various policy-making processes, and ensure that the voices of youth will be heard.

Young Oregonians understand the impact that legislation has on their lives. When policy is passed relating to their lives, they have little say in the process but experience all of the consequences— good or bad.. Without having a formal vote, it is crucial that youth voice have formal representation in the form of a youth advisory council within the Oregon Department of Education. **There is currently no youth majority led advisory body that is reflective of the Oregon Youth. SB 421 would ensure equal representation for youth across the state, and highlight marginalized voices that are crucial for making policies.**

Youth are often limited to local youth advisory boards or roles such as a high-school representative on a school board. However neither of these examples of youth voice can successfully represent the diversity of the populace, nor can they formally persuade state level elected officials. Many of the noted complaints lie within the jurisdiction of the Oregon Department of Education, which is directly responsible for the structure of a substantial amount of a student's academic career.

When it comes to advising the ODE on formal decisions, youth-leaders have valid lived experiences that need to be considered in a formal setting. Youth-leaders will give the most accurate data and experiences relating to education policy focused on youth. They can shape policy recommendations and, through these emic perspectives, share a more holistic picture that lawmakers can reference.

Youth leaders will also receive an opportunity to develop and implement important leadership and advocacy skills that will create strong civic skills that will last a lifetime. By creating the youth advisory council at the Oregon Department of Education, **youth leaders are provided an opportunity to develop and implement meaningful, youth-centered changes that have a positive, measurable, and sustainable impact on youth and educational experiences across Oregon.**

Through advocacy, youth leaders are able to develop crucial life skills, such as: strong collaboration skills, communication skills, the ability to successfully advocate for their needs, stronger academic achievement, and stronger social and emotional development skills. **Leadership strengthens character and helps build crucial skills to prepare the leaders of tomorrow.**

When youth are given a seat at the table, they will be able to effectively communicate the needs of their school environment, certain issues that could be overlooked if there were no formal youth representation. **By having youth-led policies, they would be able to successfully meet youth-needs.**

SB 421 will create a state-level youth-led youth advisory council at the Oregon Department of Education. This initiative had previously been introduced as HB 3363 (2021) and HB 4099 (2022). In both sessions, the bills passed through the House Committee of Education with bipartisan support. However, it never made it past the Ways and Means committee. It is crucial for this to pass through both committees this session.

The passage of SB 421 will give students a formal voice over their own education and learning environments, and create important life-long character development skills. **The ACLU of Oregon urges your support for Senate Bill 421 and asks you to pass it out of committee.**

Respectfully,

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