

Chairman Dembrow and Members of the committee, thank you for permitting me to testify on SB 854.

As a center-right voter, most people would be surprised to see my name among the supporters of this bill. Mainly because climate change and education policy discussions both have a reliable track record of being initiatives of the left. But I want to make an argument today that Senate Bill 854 is a chance to revisit the way that political discourse enters educational spaces and in this way is an opportunity to bring balance and critical thinking into the classroom instead of being another tool of division.

I am a third-year Linfield University student working towards my Political Science BA and in this process I have developed an internal mission to help heal our state and our nation in this time of political tumultuousness.

The opponents of this bill are correct that, without proper oversight, requiring teachers to educate students on the left-side consensus on climate change is not education at all, but rather indoctrination. They are also correct that some of the bill's requirements and minimum standards, take an alarmist and polarizing approach to these concepts. But thankfully, the Oregon Educators for Climate Education are not, in my experience, operating with these goals in mind.

I was approached by Sarah [last name] with the OECE to talk through the proposed Senate Bill because she knew of my partisan orientation and she wanted to hear what feedback I had for them. We met one day and I told her that I thought that the bill was very promising and that indeed there would be a great deal of value in implementation of statewide Climate Change Curriculum. That being said, within the bill, there are a number of moments which unintentionally alienate the political right, use racial generalizations, and which are alarmist by nature.

Section 2 Subsection 1 unintentionally tokenizes or racially generalizes the American Indian by assuming that any member of a tribe not only has qualifiable expertise (on the basis of climate or education) to be trusted with review of a climate education policy and also that they would have the interests of this bill in mind when giving this feedback. To this end, one questions the relevance of this subsection at all. According to OECE, their intention was to add this in accordance with SB 13 from the 2017 session which is understandable. Though it stands to reason that Section 2 Subsection 2 paragraph (j) should be sufficient to accomplish this goal.

The following unless specified otherwise will pertain to Section 2, Subsection 2:

Paragraph (a) requires educators to teach the subject of climate change from "diverse decision-making perspectives." In state-funded schools, this minimum standard should be the touchstone when evaluating the other minimum standards in the subsection. If this Senate Bill is granted an opportunity for revision, I compel the members of the committee to ask themselves

this question: does this minimum standard promote one specified perspective, or multiple diverse perspectives? In every case it should be the latter.

Great examples that lend themselves to diverse decision-making perspectives are found in the formulation of paragraphs (b), (f), (i), (j), (k), (l), and (m), all of which are designed to get students thinking critically and discussing the causes, severity and response to climate change.

Examples that would require reworking if they were to be consistent with paragraph (a) are found in (c), (d), (e), (g), (h) and (j).

(c) promotes a single perspective of climate alarmism by assuming that “psychological and mental health challenges” are, or will be, outcomes of climate change. The logical correction to this would be to remove the minimum standard or change it to convey uncertainty about mental health challenges and their relation to climate change. I personally have never heard mental health challenges be cited by anyone outside of this bill, which makes me doubt its relevance.

(e) promotes a single perspective that climate change has an infallible scientific basis. This standard should not be removed, but instead amended to recognize diverse perspectives on the origin and state of climate change from scientific to theological and philosophical ways of knowing which more accurately reflect the diversity of the public consensus and allow for critical discussions.

(g) the language of “increase understanding” connotatively implies truth to the assertion that there is indeed a “relationship between ecological, societal, and cultural aspects of climate change.” To change this so that it is consistent with paragraph (a) would be to say rather: “examine to what extent there is a relationship between ecological, societal, and cultural aspects of climate change.”

(h) promotes a single perspective that “Climate change disproportionately impacts the environment and natural resources of historically underserved populations.” This is the singular view of ecoracism, a highly controversial concept that implies a racial component to the outcomes of climate change, where many say that it is easier to draw a connection between geography and climate change challenges. This standard should be removed or changed to express the uncertainty of this claim and weigh it against its philosophical opponent.

Some members of the committee may be inclined to think think that my testimony, highly critical as it is, implies that really, I am not in support of it. But what I hope that they realize is that in criticizing it, I am actually steadfastly reenforcing my support. This criticism is a manifestation of care.

School should be a place of critical thinking and learning. Students must learn reading, writing and arithmetic, but they also must learn to explore the key issues facing today. This Bill, with the revisions that I have suggested, could accomplish this goal and set our next generation on a path to a more functioning democracy.

To the Republican members, I hope that you will be compelled by my argument that this Bill is worth working towards, not as it is, but as it could be. And to the Democratic members, I hope that you will engage thoroughly in this process of revision, not as an attack on your personal politics, but as a means to genuinely improve the quality of a state-funded, nonpartisan institution.