

February 11, 2025

To: House Committee On Education

From: Grace Fortson, Our Children Oregon

Subject: Support for HB 2588, Bolstering Educator Diversification

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire , and Members of the Committee:

My name is Grace Fortson and I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager with Our Children Oregon (OCO). OCO is a statewide nonprofit committed to whole child wellbeing through the Children's Agenda- a comprehensive legislative agenda created and supported by our over 135 member organizations across the state. I am testifying to represent both my personal support for HB 2588 as well as OCO's official endorsement of this bill as part of the Children's Agenda.

Many of you are likely already aware that Oregon ranks 43rd in the nation regarding educational success according to the 2024 Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2024 KIDS COUNT data. This metric is based on the number of 3-4 year olds in school, number of on-time highschool graduations, as well as proficiency in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math. This data also shows that students of color have overall far worse educational outcomes than their white peers. There are many factors that contribute to this: poverty, generational educational outcomes, and lack of diversity in educators.

To zoom in a bit, I'd like to share my own story. As a biracial person of color, it took 11 years in the education system to have a teacher that was not white. That teacher was the only non-white educator I encountered in my K-12 education. Across three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school, Ms. Hutcheson was the only educator of color. Please note, I am not saying I lacked an educator that represented my own race/ethnicity, but ANY educator of color. She immediately became a role model for me and other students of color. I appreciated this teacher immensely and

her perspective on history and government as a person of color helped launch me into my current career.

One of the most prominent obstacles to increasing diversity in our educators are hostile environments. This is addressed through HB 2588's proposal to enhance funding the Educator Apprenticeship Program. Ms. Hutcheson faced micro- and macro-aggressions of racism that were commonplace in my highschool. Some students, along with teachers, did not make a welcoming environment. After one of her colleagues had a full conversation with me under the impression that I was Ms. Hutcheson despite the fact that I was 10+ years younger and an entirely different race. When I explained the incident, I was surprised that Ms. Hutcheson's only response was, "That sounds about right." She faced discrimination regularly without adequate support.

This experience is reflected as a larger trend in the 2022 Oregon Educator Equity Report from the Educator Advancement Council. The report notes that despite increasing numbers of diverse teachers, persistent position vacancies indicate attrition and/or turnover. An average of 17% of teacher positions became vacant each year between 2019 and 2022. The highest levels of attrition were reported in Black/African American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander teachers which indicates a systems issue (p 8, Oregon Educator Equity Report).

Funding the Educator Apprenticeship Program will ensure that our education system truly supports diverse teachers, not only giving them the resources they need to be successful teachers but also to survive and thrive in potentially hostile environments. I imagine that Ms. Hutcheson's experience might have been different had she had other teachers of color to be in community with and/or dedicated supports, especially with established in-building relationships.

Thank you,

Grace Fortson, Policy and Advocacy Manager