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February 14, 2025

Dear Senate Committee on Rules:

My name is Casey Hallgarth, superintendent of Baker School District 5J, and I am writing on behalf of our school district to express our strong support for Senate Bill 450, which designates Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day in Oregon. This past November 14, our district participated in this meaningful event for the first time, with approximately 150 students from South Baker Intermediate School (4th-6th grade) walking together to honor Ruby Bridges' legacy. What began as a single-school initiative will now grow into a districtwide tradition, underscoring our commitment to education, inclusion, and student safety.

Ruby Bridges was just six years old when she courageously walked through an angry mob in 1960 to integrate William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans. Her bravery symbolized a turning point in the fight for civil rights, and her story continues to inspire young people to stand up for justice. For our students and staff, participating in Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day was not only a history lesson but also an opportunity to reflect on the importance of perseverance, equity, and community. Our students walked with purpose, discussing the impact of Ruby's actions and recognizing their own role in shaping a more inclusive future.

Beyond its historical significance, this event also aligns with the Safe Routes to School program, emphasizing the importance of ensuring safe, accessible paths for students. As a rural district, we recognize the barriers that prevent some children from safely walking or biking to school. Senate Bill 450 highlights both the importance of teaching history and the necessity of creating safe, connected routes for all students. By formalizing this day, we send a powerful message that student safety, equity, and education matter in every community across Oregon.

Using collaborative leadership, Baker 5J schools enhance community vitality by providing cradle-to-career opportunities across broad, integrated learning platforms for rewarding educational experiences.

I encourage this committee to fully review the draft bill and consider co-sponsoring Senate Bill 450. Its passage would not only honor a pivotal moment in our nation's history but also reinforce Oregon's dedication to student well-being and safe, inclusive schools. The Baker School District is committed to making Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day an annual tradition for all of our students, and we hope to see this meaningful event officially recognized statewide.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Casey Hallgarth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Casey Hallgarth, Superintendent

Baker School District 5J

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