

Submitter:

Megan Fitzgerald

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB1538

My name is Megan Fitzgerald; I am a 4th grade teacher in Forest Grove School District. I am bringing forth testimony about how the recent escalation of ICE activity in Oregon has directly impacted our students and families.

This school year; we have seen our students come into school experiencing a level of trauma and anxiety that cannot be overstated. We have sat with sobbing parents to help them develop emergency custody plans in case their children were to come home to find their parents had been taken. Many families are no longer able to work or have lost the primary breadwinners of their family. My students now know that it is no longer safe to play outside; and many are no longer able to leave the house to come to school,. Many of our students, students who love school, their teachers, and their friends, have been left with no choice but to remain isolated at home and take online classes.

Recently, one of our students witnessed from their window a man being dragged out of his vehicle and brutally beaten in the street. Another student told us, shell-shocked, that he was scared he would be next because of the color of his skin. Our students are terrified that they will come home to find their parents are gone; and for many, this fear is not unfounded, because they have already lost family members.

My students ask me, "what did we ever do wrong?" "why don't they want us here?". As adults, we want to tell them that everything is going to be okay, and that the adults in their lives will protect them.

But lately, those words seem to ring false.

Our students are living in a state of constant fear and stress. The collective trauma of the environment of fear created by ICE raids is impacting their critical years of development; and this trauma will continue to impact them for years to come. We cannot normalize this fear for our children. They deserve better. Children have a right to stability and should not have to operate in survival mode.

I teach my students to stand up for what is right; and to speak up if they see someone being mistreated. Our children are not only terrified and traumatized by what has been allowed to happen in our community, more than that, they are angry. They want to know why. They have asked me 'who is in charge?' and 'why isn't anyone doing anything to stop this?'

So I am here tonight on their behalf; to ask the questions I do not have the answers to. You are the leaders our children are looking up to now; and I ask you: what specifically is being done to protect our children?

You already know what must be done. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 1538 which will ensure that all Oregon students; regardless of immigration status, have their right to access education protected.

Finally, I urge all of you to use your platform and your power to make it known at the county, state, and federal levels that ICE is not welcome in this community. So that we can look our children in the eyes and tell them that we have done everything within our power to protect them. Our children will remember the actions you take,