

3/8/17 Written (and Oral) Testimony on behalf of HB 2649

Chair Doherty and members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of HB 2649. I am speaking to you today in enthusiastic support of this legislation, and I hope you will support it as well..

Every day a kid in just about every Oregon school is bullied. Most incidents are minor and many are one-offs; they won't be reported, and the victim will do what she or he can to avoid the bully in the future. But even if the incident is fairly unremarkable, it leaves an impression.

As a kid growing up in the late 60's and 70's, I was vaguely aware that I was different, but being the tomboy I was, I just forced this issue and gravitated to what I wanted to do regardless of what kids thought. I played the trumpet, played basketball with the boys, collected baseball cards and built model cars. While I guess I was feisty and athletic enough to march through my elementary to high school years fairly successfully, I was certainly not immune to sporadic incidents of bully-behavior. Once I was cornered alone behind my elementary school and threatened by 3 boys; in Junior High band I was occasionally targeted by a lumbering drummer who delighted in stealing my sports books.

These and a few other incidents are not noteworthy on their own. I did not alter my behavior and I did not miss school. But nonetheless, those incidents are seared into my memory over 40 years later. This, to me, highlights two critical factors: 1) How these confrontational incidents - even minor ones - can leave a lifelong memory, and 2) How little we know what is happening with and to our kids. We have certainly progressed since the 70's, and Oregon has been a leader in addressing School bullying issues... and in particular, Oregon kids themselves have taken a lead in opposing bullying and supporting victims. Youth today as a generation have become much more accepting and understanding of individual differences.

But despite that multigenerational civil advancement, the intimidation, the threats and the bullying still continue, and our kids are still victimized daily.

Just last night,(3/7/17) KOIN TV reported that Grant High in Portland was vandalized with threatening and homophobic graffiti. While Grant High staff and students endeavor to have a welcoming environment, this is what one of the kids said when interviewed:

“Walking through the halls, you hear slurs and homophobic language all the time,” she said. “I think for a lot of people who aren’t queer it came as a complete shock because they’re not aware of how much this goes on on a daily basis.”

<http://koin.com/2017/03/07/homophobic-slur-scrawled-on-grant-hs-bathroom-wall/>

Unfortunately, the adult world is setting a horrific standard for our youth. From bomb threats to over 130 Jewish Centers and Synagogues in the nation since January, to the murder of Sikh man in Olathe, Kansas, to an elected Oregon official publically and generically criticizing Muslim and transgender youth, our poor behavior as adults seeps into our schools like an epidemic.

As elected leaders and as activists before you, we all must always endeavor to be that good and greater part of the adult world and work to counteract the insidious intimidation, hate and violence that is both seen and unseen.

Every day a kid in every Oregon school is is bullied. Every one of them needs to know we are serious about protecting them.

Thank you again for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Carla "KC" Hanson

Portland