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To: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

From: Luke Bennett

RE: HB 2864

Hello Chair Reardon, Vice-Chairs Alonso-Leon and Whisnant, Committee Members, thank you for having me.

My name is Luke Bennett and I am a student at Oregon State University, where I serve as a senator in our student government. I grew up in a small town outside of Eugene, Oregon, where the socioeconomic status was about the same, and the phrase “Cultural Competency” simply didn’t exist. I attended school with primarily White students, and encountered little diversity among my small, secluded town of just under 10,000 citizens. And so it begs the question: for what reasons should I be caring about cultural competency? Lack of cultural competency isn’t about how it affects me specifically — it’s about discrimination, and micro-aggressions that impact my friends, my acquaintances, and my coworkers. It’s about a lack of understanding and a lack of care, even if unintentional, as most situations surrounding micro aggressions are.

Just last week, my friend explained to me how her teacher had assumed she knew Spanish, simply because of the color of her skin. For some, this may seem minuscule, and insignificant. For my friend even, who didn’t consider it of monumental importance at the time, soon came to realize the constant assumptions and lack of understanding that she faced from her teachers far too often. A colleague of mine, who was asked to speak to the importance of another culture by her teacher, was caught off guard, as she felt uncomfortable with the notion of generalizing her entire culture, and the appropriation of it through the media and her teachers. Furthermore, if we are to argue that there isn’t more room to learn, nor more room to improve, then we must recognize the implications and long lasting effects that lie therein.

Much like a musician, or a teacher who never stops learning, we too must accept that there is room for continued growth and advancement surrounding cultural competency. We must accept that we are always beginners, and in doing so, will help further stop the effects felt by my friends and colleagues alike. This begins with holding our instructors and institutions accountable, to the same degree that we hold ourselves as students accountable. Maybe then, small towns like mine will finally hear the words “Cultural Competency,” and further move toward being more culturally competent in the town, school, and community around us.

Thank you,

Luke Bennett