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To: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

From: Brent Finkbeiner

RE: HB 2864

Hello Chair Reardon, Vice-Chairs Alonso-Leon and Whisnant, Committee Members,

My name is Brent Finkbeiner and I truly appreciate you giving me the honor of speaking here today. I'm currently a student at Portland Student University, Chair of the Student Senate, and working towards my bachelor's in business management and leadership. Last academic year, as student body president at Clackamas CC and board chair for the Oregon Community College Student Association, I had the opportunity to participate in this workgroup and I'd like to tell you why our work is so important and the impact it can have on our communities.

Cultural competency is an important part of everyday American life, unfortunately, it does not get the attention it deserves. We do not have enough open dialogue on what it means to be culturally competent. It means understanding that culture, including ethnicity, color, creed, ability, and need, all shape who we are. It means making an attempt to understand the nuances of what happens where cultures intersect and how the impact of culture is global. Within our own nation, it means understanding that different individuals have had wildly different experiences, and no two are exactly the same. There's a myth being propagated today, that we shouldn't see color or gender. That idea sounds great, it sounds moral and just... but only if we think ahistorical, only if we think yesterday has no impact on today. The truth is, being color-blind or something of the like is a very privileged stance to take. For generations, people of color, women, and people with disabilities in this nation have had no choice but to look at their own color, gender, or ability and be defined by it according to the dominant population.

Before I continue, I'd like to add that I am a veteran, I served as a combat medic in the Army from 2006 to 2010 and saw one deployment to Iraq with the 4th Infantry Division and I love my country, including everyone in it, very much. So, the reason why I support HB 2864 is because I believe it will aid our underrepresented populations, populations that I swore an oath to protect. For too long we've gone without metrics for cultural competence in education, this bill could fix that. It could give each institution the means to establish oversight into the matter and handle issues as they see fit, meaning institutions can tailor their programs to the specific needs of their communities. This bill would give us the opportunity to establish the much needed dialogue surrounding culture in our nation right down to our individual committees. By giving educators to tools to improve cultural competence in higher education, we are laying the foundations for acceptance and creating an environment where everyone feels safe, respected, and included.