

School Safety Testimony – Daniel Bonham

Chair Doherty, Vice Chairs Hernandez and Wilson, Members of the Committee,

My name is Daniel Bonham. I represent the citizens of House District 59, which encompasses the Central Oregon and the Columbia River Gorge communities of the Confederated Tribe of Warm Springs, Culver, Fossil, Madras, Maupin, Metolius, Mitchell, Mosier, Sisters, Spray, The Dalles, as well as unincorporated areas of Wasco, Jefferson, Deschutes, Clackamas, Marion, and Wheeler Counties.

Before we begin today, I'd like to thank Chairwomen Doherty. The time of a committee is valuable during a short session. Vice Chair Diego Hernandez, this would not be possible without you. Thank you. Representative Sprenger, thank you for joining me as a co-chief.

I'd also like to thank the School Districts and the Oregon Education Association. From day one you've been open to dialogue. We might not yet agree on a solution but you've shown respect and I appreciate that.

An estimated one in ten K–12 students will experience sexual abuse at the hands of a school employee at some point in their education. In Oregon, we're talking about a staggering **57 thousand students**. The sadness and rage that we all feel when hearing these words cannot be described.

Make no mistake, Oregon's educators are some of the best people that I know. From Mrs. Conklin, Mrs. Baylon, Mrs. Stoneberg, Mrs. Denton, Mrs. Schniederman, to Mrs. Stoneberg again, to Mrs. Hampton and Tarbell- that's just my homeroom elementary teachers. I could easily name every teacher from Kindergarten through graduating at Linfield College and heap praise upon them all.

But we cannot turn a blind eye to evil. Our schools have such people teaching our children, and it's hard to know whether it's a horrifying trend or a vile anomaly because of the inconsistency in information that is available. Either way, it is an alarming reality: These predators often get hired at other schools even after crimes or conduct get them dismissed from their previous post, which means too many adults are shirking their professional and moral responsibility.

Whether it's the well-publicized case of Mitch Whitehurst- 13 years of sexual misconduct throughout Portland Public Schools, or the stories that came to light last week about Marc Jollet of Tigard High School.

It's tragic. It's real and it cannot be ignored.

In the 2007-08 Interim House Education Committee and Interim Senate and Education General Government Committee held a series of public hearings on the issue of teacher sexual

misconduct toward students. As a result, the Oregon Legislature unanimously passed then State Representative Sara Gelser's **HB 2062-A** (2009). The bill made an effort to address the problem but left open loopholes for abuse to continue and that is why we are here today. And why we continue to hear these stories.

HB 4119 prevents the practices of educators slipping away from a job after allegations of sexual misconduct arise. Current Oregon law allow for education providers to sweep allegations of misconduct under the rug. As a result, teachers can flee troubled pasts for a new start in a new school district. Closing this loophole prevents school districts from hiring teachings under investigation for alleged sexual misconduct.

Teachers accused of sexual misconduct with a student are not always unemployable. Oftentimes, these teachers resign, retire, or are terminated and allowed to quietly move to another school district without his or her new employer being alerted to the allegations of misconduct. **HB 4119** seeks to address this problem by accomplishing the following:

- Incoming schools and districts will have access to a teachers personnel file when considering employment of the teacher.
- And it prohibits all forms of a contract that has the effect of suppressing personnel records.

We must act responsibly. We cannot create policy that increases the liability on school districts that already do the right thing and provide information. We cannot ruin careers over hearsay. However, we cannot say that this problem doesn't exist for yet another day. The goal of this bill is simple: to prevent predators from gaining access to children in schools.

Members of the committee, I thank you for your time.