



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

College of Education

February 11, 2019

Good afternoon Chair Wagner and members of the committee.

For the record, my name is Dr. Leilani Sabzalian and I am a Professor of Indigenous Studies in Education at the University of Oregon. I am here to testify to the importance of Senate Bill 14, which puts the existing American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success Plan into state law and funds its activities. I provided testimony in support of SB 13, though at that time I spoke primarily as a mother and shared what this bill would mean to me as the parent of two Native students who attend public school in Oregon. Today I am speaking as a teacher educator, researcher, and scholar on Indigenous studies in education. I am also speaking as a member of the American Indian/Alaska Native Advisory Council who helped draft the 2015 AI/AN State Education plan, and have seen how the important objectives we created to help AI/AN students succeed lack adequate funding for implementation.

I work directly with Native youth and families in a Title VI/Indian Education program, and with Native college students in the Sapsik^walá Native teacher education program at the University of Oregon. I teach college courses on Indigenous studies, and culturally responsive, sustaining, and revitalizing pedagogies to future teachers, and also lead in-service teacher trainings on Indigenous education. I have also conducted research on how districts, schools, and teachers support, or fail to support Native students in public schools.

In this capacity I have found that the majority of public school teachers, administrators, and schools are unprepared to effectively serve Native students, and to teach content related to tribal history, sovereignty, culture, treaty rights, government, socio-economic experiences, and current events. I have spent a great deal of time with teachers on Indians 101: What is the correct terminology to use, what is a tribal government, what is tribal sovereignty, etc. I have encountered many good hearted, well-intentioned teachers with little working knowledge of these issues. This is not to berate these educators, who I admire so much, teachers who do their best to move mountains in their classrooms despite limited resources, teachers who care deeply for their students and are navigating multiple and competing mandates, teachers who still manage to find time for PE and art and music even as they are increasingly being pressured to teach to the test.

Rather, my purpose is to comment on the widespread ignorance about Native peoples, experiences, and issues that I routinely encounter in my teaching and research. This ignorance is not an individual issue; it is a systemic issue. Indigenous

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education is also a systemic issue. The assimilative nature of public education has not been a matter of a few cruel individuals, but a systemic issue. The lack of Native perspectives in curriculum is not an individual issue, but a systemic issue. The contempt and attempted eradication of Indigenous languages in this state was not an individual issue, but a systemic one. Likewise, public schools' inability to serve Native students effectively—evident in the disproportionately low graduation, achievement, and postsecondary enrollment rates, as well as the high rates of chronic absenteeism—is not an anomaly particular to an individual school, but a widespread systemic problem.

Systemic issues require systemic responses. SB 14 is a systemic response to a systemic problem. This bill will support ODE's efforts to develop and implement the statewide AI/AN student success plan.

There are pockets of good work out there; teachers and schools working tirelessly to support Native students and responsibly implement Native studies curriculum in Oregon public schools. But Native students shouldn't be fortunate to be successful in Oregon's public school system. They shouldn't be lucky to get a teacher who understands their experiences, who supports them in a culturally responsive way, or who effectively teaches Native studies curriculum.

This should be a promise of Oregon's public school system.

I am urging you to pass SB 14 so that the success of Native students in public schools is no longer the exception, but the norm. I am urging you to pass SB 14 so that the experience of a Native student having a teacher, administrator, school system, and curriculum that understands them and supports them in a culturally responsive and sustaining way is not an anomaly, but a structural promise of our public school system.

Thank you for listening.

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[Information and title for identification purposes only]