

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am writing in support of HB 4145. This bill addresses three critical issues in our schools: mental health, safety and improving working conditions for teachers. Oregon must take proactive steps to prevent gun violence in schools and places of worship.

This bill will improve the safety of our schools

According to Education Week, there were 25 school shootings in 2019 nationally that resulted in physical injuries or deaths. Gun violence has become so pervasive that students are no longer surprised when it happens in their schools. Following school shootings in both Texas and California, affected students remarked that they were not surprised that their school had a school shooting. This sense of inevitability will continue, unless we act now. “Eighty-three percent of perpetrators of acts of mass violence at schools included verbal, visual, or video communication that referenced their intent to target or threaten others” (U.S. Secret Service, 2019). The question is, what do we do when threats are made?

This bill will invest in mental health care

HB 4145 provides funding for mental health evaluation and treatment for people who threaten mass violence in schools or places of worship. We have to take action once a threat of school violence is established. The vast majority of school shootings have some communication of intent prior to the event. Providing mental health evaluation and treatment could save lives, help get people the help they need, and communicate that threats of school violence are taken seriously. This bill provides important funding to increase the mental health capacity of our communities.

This is a workers’ rights issue

Teachers are the most important in school factor for student learning. Over time, we have asked teachers to do more and more. Class sizes have gone up, standards have changed, and working conditions have deteriorated. Teachers are scared to go to work. According to the most recent data, ten percent of public school teachers say they were threatened with injury by a student (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). School safety is a workers’ rights issue.

This bill will protect freedom of religion

There has been a significant increase in hate crimes in places of worship in the past four years. This bill will provide mental health funding for the evaluation and/or treatment for people who threaten mass violence against a place of worship. This is critical to combat the rise in hate related violence throughout the country.

I have spent my career in education: as a high school teacher, a school board member, and now as a professor of educational policy. I spend my days thinking about how to improve our schools. But policy solutions for supporting teachers, school accountability, and school funding are empty if our kids are not safe. We need to take proactive steps to prevent gun violence. I strongly urge the passage of HB 4145.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns regarding my support for this bill.

Sincerely,

Andy Saultz
Assistant Professor of Educational Policy