



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor



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DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

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**Colt Gill**

Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction

## MOVING EQUITY FORWARD

### **HB 2052: Tribal Regalia & Objects of Cultural Significance** **Senate Education Committee** **April 21, 2021**

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the committee, I am Jessica Ventura, Government Relations Director for the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2056.

Each year, our Director Colt Gill sends a letter to school district superintendents and high school principals reminding them of the importance of allowing American Indian/Alaska Native students to wear traditional tribal regalia or objects of cultural significance at school events and especially graduation. However, we still hear reports of students being denied their inherent right to express their culture. At the request of education leaders from the nine federally recognized tribes and other partners, we have put forth this bill that schools allow American Indian/Alaska Native Students to wear traditional tribal regalia or objects of cultural significance at school events.

Fundamentally, this bill affirms tribal sovereignty in the state of Oregon. It recognizes Native American self-determination, self-governance and decision making on issues that affect their own people. We believe this bill will encourage school districts to acknowledge this fact and will create further understanding in how to better support their American Indian/Alaska Native students.

Graduation is a time of celebration - a recognition of how much the student has accomplished on their educational journey. American Indian/Alaska Native graduates across the state receive eagle feathers to be worn at graduation to signify this academic achievement and leadership and to honor the graduate, the graduate's family, community, and tribal nation. It is especially important to celebrate a student who has overcome major obstacles on their way to success; it is well-documented that disparities persist in education for American Indian students in Oregon, including graduation rates. While we have more work to do to promote equitable educational opportunity for all students, HB 2052 will ensure that American Indian/Alaska Native students can feel pride and dignity in the recognition of their academic achievements and their cultural heritage, particularly at important milestones such as graduation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments, and we welcome any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Ventura

Government Relations Director