

I write to you today as a Latina mother who has been an Oregon resident for 25 years and who holds great respect for teachers. I also hold high hopes my three children will have opportunities to learn alongside a number of BIPOC teachers throughout their educational journeys.

Oregon is in dire need of both recruiting and retaining BIPOC teachers, but HB2001-5 is not the answer. Before compromising the union mechanisms that protect our senior teachers, our master teachers, we must look deeply at the roots behind why it is so difficult to recruit, let alone retain teachers of color. The reasons behind this difficulty lie in systemic racism and are embedded in our educational institutions and our greater communities. Until we invest our time, energy, and resources in making our schools, districts, towns, and state welcoming, safe, and a healthy place for BIPOC community members, this will continue to be a challenge. This bill holds great potential to serve as a distraction from the actual issues, and I am gravely concerned that there will be a sense that a problem has been solved, when in fact, it has only been superficially considered.

I implore you to table this bill and look at the numbers before making a decision. Is our representation truly so out of balance because of layoffs? Or are we lacking the ability to first attract, and then retain teachers of color because our district cultures are inhospitable and downright antagonistic towards our teachers of color? Our teachers with the greatest seniority are also the ones with the protections in place to speak up about problems in school districts. They are the ones who serve as mentors. They are our master teachers who guide our incoming teachers in a way that can lead them towards long and fruitful careers. Union protection based on seniority also lets teachers know they are valued and that they have the promise of long careers ahead of them. This bill seems as though it might shift our representation percentages. But that is only a possibility, not a promise. What it will do, however, is contribute to the all too common fear-based culture that has permeated too many school districts. And a fear-based culture, during this teacher shortage, is the last thing we need to grow.

Please support our unions in supporting our teachers. Please table or oppose this bill.