

Dear Members of the Oregon State Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing to support HB2631 relating to procedures for hostile educational environments in support of the family of Carson Bride and all of our state's children.

My daughter attended Riverdale High School from 2014 to 2018 and was subjected to bullying and intimidation by both students and a teacher during that time. During my daughter's senior year, one such incident created significant trauma for her. It also stirred up controversy amongst the students. Yet, despite this, the school never once contacted us. When I questioned the school, their only response was that FERPA prevented them from speaking to me at all about the situation. I had strong suspicions, from the furor amongst the children on social media and in the building, that the school was not thoroughly investigating the incident and were not taking proper remedial steps. I also believe I had a right to know what harm had been done to my child in the school building and how the school responded to it. Without any information, we were severely disabled in supporting her needs and she felt that she had no adult at school advocating for her. Within weeks a psychiatric nurse practitioner issued an order to the school to release my daughter from school at midday, citing the lack of control over the unsafe hostile environment. Riverdale's unwillingness to disclose any information not only impeded my daughter's ability to receive a public education free from harassment and intimidation, but also caused significant harm to all of the students involved as well as their peers. This situation led to the dissolution of valuable childhood friendships, unwarranted antagonism and hostility, and an unwelcome climate at school functions.

We are fortunate today to have a new administration that fosters communication, transparency, and the kind of collaboration with parents that truly embraces equity and inclusion work as well as restorative justice standards. It is my firm belief that if HB2631 had been in place when my daughter attended Riverdale, the administration's inconsistent and nonsensical policies towards bullying would not have escaped the scrutiny that it did for many years. Carson Bride was four years younger than my daughter, Shayla. I am devastated that I did not fight harder and help change the trajectory of Carson's experience. It devastates me to think that a simple policy like this -- a rule that I believe most people assume is already in place -- could have enabled his parents to save his life.

Please support this legislation and continue to advance the protection of our beloved children at every opportunity.

Sincerely,
Dimati McPherson (she/her)