



February 22nd, 2021
House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil Law
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2937¹ Bias Incidents in Schools

Chair Byum, Vice Chair Noble, and members of the committee,

My name is Andrea Valderrama and I am here representing the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 28,415 members and supporters statewide. We support HB 2937 which aims to address bias incidents in schools.

As an organization, we value community care and safety. These values play an especially important role in our advocacy efforts around bias and hate crimes in schools. We have been horrified and deeply concerned about the increased number of incidences of bias in Oregon schools² towards Black, Indigenous, and students of color since the COVID 19 pandemic and as a direct result of the racist and xenophobic language used by our 45th president³.

Incidences of bias have lasting negative mental and emotional health impacts on children and their families and make it extremely difficult to retain or learn new information in school. The *Hate at School*⁴ report published by the Southern Poverty Law Center states, “These students are more likely to report symptoms of stress, depression, ADHD, risk-taking activities, school avoidance and more. Recent research suggests that racial-ethnic discrimination can cause behavioral problems for children as young as seven”.

We especially appreciate the following components of the bill:

- 1. Providing students and families an option to bring legal action against school districts and perpetrators for incidents of bias.** This is an essential step forward in the healing and justice processes necessary for student success and wellbeing.
- 2. Granting transfer requests made by students impacted by bias crimes.** All students deserve an alternative place of learning that isn't retraumatizing or unsafe.

¹ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Measures/Overview/HB2937>

² <https://www.opb.org/news/article/portland-oregon-high-schools-hate-incidents-community-action/>

³ <https://apnews.com/article/4b9c7f519a3951a6d34bbe91dd4fbe21>

⁴ https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/ft_2019_hate_at_school_report_final_0.pdf



We know that there is more work to be done to ensure safety for students being targeted by bias because of their race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender/sex, religion or ability, and we look forward to partnering with you all on those next steps and on implementing this essential first step.

For these reasons, the ACLU of Oregon urges you to support HB 2362.

Thank you,

Andrea Valderrama
Policy Director
ACLU of Oregon