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February 23, 2021

TO: House Education Committee

FR: Morgan Allen, COSA

RE: Testimony in support of House Bill 2697 and the -4 amendments

Chair Alonso Leon and members of the House Education Committee, on behalf of the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators and our 2500 members across Oregon, we urge your support for House Bill 2697. We believe that the bill will bolster the work of the State Board of Education's recently adopted policy of "Every Student Belongs" and is necessary to continue to interrupt and dismantle racism and hate on Oregon school campuses.

In the past few years, we've seen an increase in racist threats and assaults on our students and their families. That, in addition to a global pandemic, continues to shine a light on the injustices our Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and Tribal communities have faced for generations. This has sparked important conversations across the state and it is critical that schools provide a safe, welcoming learning environment where students, families, and staff will not be impacted by racist or hateful symbols, language, or actions. And we applaud our students for taking the lead and serving as catalysts for this important, and long overdue, policy change.

Oregon, like the rest of our nation, is also experiencing calls for social change. Conversations about race and racism are at the forefront of these challenging times in our country. It is clear that "business as usual" has not served all communities equitably and we must continue to work to bring meaningful change to our schools and our society. Any conversation about stamping out racism must address symbols that are used to convey hate, fear, and intimidation.

Symbols are all around us and are used to deliver ideas, share opinions or beliefs, trigger emotions, or deliver messages. In our state and our country, the symbols of the neo-Nazi movement, the noose, and the confederate battle flag have served as the most notorious embodiments of racial hatred, white supremacy and Anti-Semitism for decades. We are also painfully aware of Oregon's racist history and the legacy of institutionalized racism and social and racial injustice it has left us with.

These hate symbols are another form of bullying that is disruptive to learning and in some cases has led to violence against our students. It is past time that we ensure that no students, staff, or community members are exposed or assaulted by these symbols while at school or school events. Period.

COSA supports this work and will continue to partner with ODE to ensure that implementation is immediate and meaningful in our schools and communities.

We urge your passage of HB 2697. Thank you for your support.