



**Advocating for Equity and
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House Committee on Education
Testimony in Support of SB 1521

February 15, 2022

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chairs Neron and Weber,
Representatives George, Hudson, Owens, Reardon, Ruiz,
Smith Warner, and Wright,

My name is Mariotta Gary-Smith, and I serve as Chair for the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs (OCBA). I am writing this testimony regarding SB 1521, which would provide greater protections against retaliation against school superintendents if they are following state or federal laws. On behalf of OCBA, we urge you to support SB 1521,

1. OCBA is charged with working towards economic, social, political, and legal equity for Oregon's Black residents and communities. This is done through advocacy, public policy research, leadership development, and partnerships.
2. In our statutory role, we seek to bring the full voice of community and the lens of equity to bear onto Oregon policy making - in that OCBA supports SB 1521.

With the removal of the superintendent in Newberg and Albany, it's clear that the absence of someone in these critical positions is deeply troubling and traumatic; this sentiment is noted in a letter from the President of the Oregon Association of School Executives (OASE). It refers to a two-year period (2018-2019 and 2021-2022) where there were 127

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Black Affairs**

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Mariotta Gary-Smith

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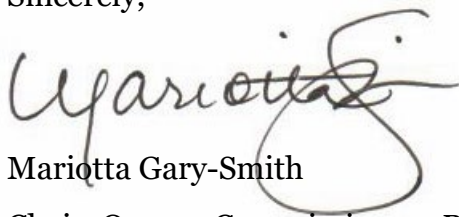
superintendent vacancies in Oregon. Having a large number of vacant spots for the superintendent in the schools is alarming and harms Oregon residents.

Woodson, McLennan, and Pérez (2021) released a study on the challenges experienced by BIPOC superintendents; while almost 40% of Oregon's 560,000 students are diverse, only nine superintendents identify as BIPOC, which is only 4% of all superintendents in the state. To match the student population makeup, there needs to be 71 school superintendents of color to match the student population make up.

SB 1521 would provide necessary employment protections - and help with the potential recruitment of Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC) candidates. These are highly underrepresented in Oregon's leadership, and the passing of this bill would offer much needed protection and support for these superintendents to do their work, especially the BIPOC superintendents who face additional stressors in their position by account of their appearance and the intense scrutiny they experience. While this bill by no means removes the challenges of the historical racism and sexism that has deeply impacted our educational system, this can be a starting point for making a clear statement and move towards honoring people who work for the betterment of our youth and communities. Diverse Oregon students deserve diverse Oregon leaders.

I strongly urge that you pass SB 1521 to protect Oregon's superintendents and their families from retaliation efforts.

Sincerely,



Mariotta Gary-Smith

Chair, Oregon Commission on Black Affairs

