



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of HB 3144

February 15, 2023

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Ruiz, and members of the committee,

My name is Khanh Pham, State Representative for House District 46. I am honored to support this important bill that will create a Pacific Islander Student Success Plan.

Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian students in Oregon are seeing unacceptable education disparities where it's being measured, according to the latest year of the Oregon Statewide Education Report Card. Disparities including: lower graduation rates, above average suspensions/expulsions and decreasing attendance to staggering dropout rates and statewide academic assessment; all trends similar to other student groups who have been granted student success plan legislation.

There is a dire need to provide more resources and targeted interventions for the academic opportunity gap hurting Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian students.

This bill is modeled off of the best practices from the 4 other Student Success Plans for other culturally specific student groups passed in 2019 & 2021 (African American, Latinx, Native, LGBTQ2IA+). It has a **worthy fiscal impact of \$2.5 million**, mainly funding an education analyst to manage the program and community grant funding to build the student success plan. It would not require new designated funding. Dollars would be drawn from Student Success Act Statewide Initiatives funding, and Grant & Aid accounts from ODE. District-level implementation would draw from the Student Investment Account.

Talking with the ODE Data team, we know that there are 12,000+ PI students in Oregon schools, but the data in aggregate hides the fact that there are 4,000 that identify as Pacific Islander alone, and more than 8,000 who identify as Pacific Islander and another ethnicity. We need a specific plan to find out more about our Pacific Islander student population and address the opportunity gaps. **Pacific Islander communities are one of the single fastest growing ethnic groups in Oregon**, according to the 2020 census, numbering at least 40,000 strong in our state, with large and growing communities in Multnomah, Marion, Washington, Benton and Union counties in particular.

This bill is a product of community-led conversations. The [Oregon Pacific Islander Coalition](#) has been discussing how to craft a bill like this with ODE since April 2021, and this House Education committee advanced this bill in the 2022 session. Pacific Islander

students' needs can often get lost when they're lumped in with the larger Asian and Pacific Islander category. This is a concerted effort to pursue Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian student success as a stand-alone, not tied to the Asian community, to honor this community and the unique challenges they face. A push for some version of a Student Success Plan to serve Asian students will likely come in the future, but PI Student success needs to get done today, for students who can trace their ancestry to the Pacific islands of Micronesia, Melanesia, Polynesia, and Hawaii.

The spirit of student success plans acknowledges growing acceptance in our education policy that **student performance is greatly affected by factors outside the classroom, factors outside the control of students**. There were acute needs for Pacific Islander students and families even before this pandemic. Oregon has the **highest concentration of COFA Islanders** within the contiguous United States. COFA islanders are people born on a Pacific island signed on to the **Compact of Free Association (COFA)** agreement with the US. The Compact of Free Association originated as a result of the devastating nuclear testing that the US carried out in their waters, as well as their ongoing storage of nuclear waste on their islands, which continues to harm COFA and Pacific Islanders decades later to this day. In recognition of this harm and their responsibilities, the US government signed the Compact which allows COFA islanders to live and work in the US without restrictions, but they can never become US citizens. Because COFA residents cannot become citizens, many Pacific Islanders in Oregon have minimal access to public health services and resources (like SNAP food benefits and TANF) that they would otherwise be eligible for if not for their unique immigration status.

And now **COVID-19 has taken one of the heaviest tolls on Oregon's Pacific Islander communities**. Reports from Oregon Health Authority in Summer 2020, in the peak of the first COVID wave, stated "Pacific Islanders had the highest rates of COVID-19 in Oregon. Coronavirus infection rates are about 12 times that of white Oregonians, according to data from the Oregon Health Authority." **PI Student Success is also about continued COVID-19 response** for impacted communities, particularly students.

This Legislature has had **bi-partisan, bi-cameral support for Pacific Islander communities**, including on the issues of tuition equity, access to the Oregon Health Plan, and SNAP benefits. And I'm happy to report we have similar bipartisan, bicameral support on this bill. It is my hope we continue in that spirit to pass Pacific Islander Student Success. I urge your support for HB 3144 and welcome any questions. Thank You.