

Date: February 28th, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Ronnie Strode, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland

Re: Support for Establishing Youth Advisory Council, SB 421

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 421. My name is Ronnie Strode and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Data shows that there are significant disparities in school suspensions, absences, and educational outcomes for Black students compared to their white peers. These disparities have a lasting impact on the future success of these students. In the 2021 to 2022 school year, The Oregon Department of Education reported there are nearly 13,000 Black students enrolled in school statewide. This means there are thousands of students whose voices and experiences may not be heard. By prioritizing the experiences of historically underrepresented groups such as BIPOC, LGBTQ2SIA+, emerging bilingual students, and students with disabilities, this bill has the potential to bring about meaningful change and create a more equitable education system.

Advisory councils work and already exist in Oregon. Since 2021, the Racial Justice Council has advised both Governor Brown and Governor Kotek on the implementation of strategies designed to institutionalize racial justice into state business, policies, and practices. The guidance of the council has, and will continue to, ensure that government structures are informed and aligned with a racial justice framework. The advice and recommendations of the Racial Justice Council allows Oregon to better create policy tailored to the specific needs and wants of communities of color, rather than the wishes of far-away pundits with no intimate knowledge or culturally specific connection to communities of color. The success of the Racial Justice Council can continue through SB 421 and the establishment of a Youth Advisory Council.

The perspective of the youth on this advisory council will allow for the evaluation of current processes to identify and create best practices for youth and students to report hate or bias crimes. Since the creation of the Bias Response Hotline in 2021, there have been over 4000 documented reports of bias crimes or bias incidents. Allowing youth to have meaningful contributions and discussions about their lived experiences and knowledge will encourage victims of bias crimes to continue to come forward and make their stories known.

By creating an advisory youth council, the Oregon department of education can hear first-hand from the lived experiences of individuals. This direct line of communication will inform our efforts to create policies and practices that support all students, especially those who have been historically underrepresented or underserved. Involving youth, particularly those from marginalized communities, in the policy-making process is critical in addressing the root causes of these disparities. This bill will empower youth to have a voice in shaping their own future and the future of their communities. By supporting diverse youth leaders, we can ensure that the policies and practices that impact their lives are developed with their perspectives and experiences in mind.

Passing SB 421 is crucial in addressing the disparities that exist in our education system. We must act now to address the disparities that exist and provide a brighter future for all our students.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronnie D Strode III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large "R" and "S", and the Roman numeral "III" is written with three distinct vertical strokes.

Ronnie D. Strode III

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