

Chair Lively, Vice Chair Ruiz, Vice Chair McIntire, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Yazzie Chee, I am a student at the University of Oregon, and I am here today to speak in support of HB 2472.

As a person of color living in a predominantly white state, I have experienced various forms of racism and discrimination. Unfortunately, even as a student at UO, I have faced racial discrimination. Last year, a fellow student directed a racial slur associated with my Indigenous heritage and identity towards me, which left me mentally traumatized. Out of respect for myself and others, I will refrain from repeating what was said. To my white peers, it was just a word. They couldn't comprehend the power and damage associated with that word. Those around me convinced me that I was the issue, and that my reaction to what had been said was dramatic. This made me decide not to report the harassment to the administration or authorities, as I didn't feel safe, and I doubted that my words would hold any weight. Consequently, for the next six months, I lived in isolation, scared of finding myself in another situation like that. I stopped attending social gatherings, looking for new friends, and completely cut myself off from this community out of fear. I hated myself for being different and tried to conceal my differences to make myself less of a target. However, after enrolling in a career advancement class that focused on students of color, I started feeling more accepted and understood the dynamics of this community. I discovered a group of people who supported me, and when I shared my experience, they didn't ridicule me but instead provided me with resources in case a similar situation arose again. For the first time since enrolling at UO, I finally saw the environment that the administration was working to create. Thanks to their support, I started engaging more with the larger community and have never felt more accepted. I have since created opportunities and built a life that I'm proud of. However, those six months of isolation and mental trauma are six months that I'll never get back. Situations like this happen every day, and they are beyond our control. But as a community, we can react and aid those affected by it, and ultimately, create a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone.

These issues are unacceptable. Oregon does not have a statewide, statutory strong stance or set of fan expectations when it comes to racist, sexist, or bigoted language that infringes upon the rights of others. HB 2472 would work to change that. Thank you for your time, and we hope that students can count on your support.