



AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

Oregon

March 2, 2023

Senate Committee on Education
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 421

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 28,000 members statewide.

The ACLU of Oregon strongly supports Senate Bill 421, which would create a state-level, majority youth-led Racial Equity and Justice Youth Collaborative within the Oregon Department of Education. SB 421 would ensure that youth voices are heard by supporting young leaders across the state in various policy-making processes.

Young Oregonians understand the impact that legislation has on their lives. When policy is passed relating to their lives, youth have little say in the process but experience all of the consequences — good or bad. Without having a formal vote, it is crucial that youth voices have formal representation in the form of a youth advisory council within the Oregon Department of Education. **There is currently no youth-majority-led advisory body that is reflective of Oregon's young population. SB 421 would ensure equal representation for youth across the state and highlight marginalized voices that are crucial for making policies.**

Youth are often limited to local youth advisory boards or roles such as a high school representative on a school board. However, neither of these roles can successfully represent the diversity of the populace or formally persuade state-level elected officials. Oregon Department of Education (ODE), is directly responsible for the structure of a substantial amount of a student's academic career. When it comes to advising the ODE on formal decisions, youth leaders have valid lived experiences that need to be considered in a formal setting. Youth leaders can give the most accurate data and experiences relating to education policy focused on youth. They can shape policy recommendations and, through these academic perspectives, share a more holistic picture for lawmakers to reference.

Youth leaders will also receive an opportunity to develop and implement important leadership and advocacy skills that will create strong civic skills that will last a lifetime. By

creating the youth advisory council at the Oregon Department of Education, **youth leaders are provided an opportunity to develop and implement meaningful, youth-centered changes that have a positive, measurable, and sustainable impact on youth and educational experiences across Oregon.**

Through advocacy, youth leaders are able to develop crucial life skills, such as strong collaboration skills, communication skills, the ability to successfully advocate for their needs, stronger academic achievement, and stronger social and emotional development skills. **Leadership opportunities strengthen character and helps build crucial skills to prepare the leaders of tomorrow for real-world challenges.**

When youth are given a seat at the table, they can effectively communicate the needs of their school environment and other issues that could be overlooked without formal youth representation. **Youth-led policies can successfully meet young people's needs.**

SB 421 will create a state-level youth-led youth advisory council within the Oregon Department of Education. This initiative was previously introduced as HB 3363 (2021) and HB 4099 (2022). In both sessions, the bills passed through the House Committee of Education with bipartisan support. However, they never made it past the Ways and Means committee. It is crucial for this bill to pass through both committees this session.

The passage of SB 421 will give students a formal voice over their own education and learning environments and create opportunities to develop important, life-long skills. **The ACLU of Oregon urges your support for Senate Bill 421 and asks you to pass it out of committee.**

Respectfully,

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High School Policy Intern