



Date: March 16th, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Education

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

Re: Support for Students with Disabilities Student Success Plan, SB 575

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 575. 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.

The Oregon Department of Education reported in 2021-2022 there are "546,238 students enrolled in school statewide, 83,239 of which were students with disabilities."¹ Oregon has thousands of students with disabilities that are not being set up for success. In the 2019 and 2021 sessions, bills were passed to support student success plans for African American, Latinx, Native, and LGBTQIA+ students after a statewide academic assessment was conducted and results showed disparities for these student groups. Just like these student groups, students with disabilities also need success plans that are tailored to their specific needs and accommodations to ensure they thrive both socially and academically.

Education is one of the most powerful tools we have for breaking down systemic barriers and creating a more equitable society. Unfortunately, for far too long, the education system has perpetuated and reinforced systemic racism and discrimination, leading to disparities in academic achievement, student attendance, graduation rates, and opportunities for historically marginalized students like students of color, LGBT+ students, and students with disabilities.² These disparities have a lasting impact on the future success of these students.³ The proposed changes of Senate Bill 575 are a crucial step in addressing this injustice.

Senate Bill 575 directs the Department of Education to develop and implement a statewide education plan for students who are eligible for special education and who have experienced disparate outcomes in academic achievement. This reform is especially important to students of color, who are overrepresented in special education classrooms due to factors such as test bias, poverty, poor general education instruction, and insufficient professional development for working with diverse students.⁴

The creation of a knowledgeable and trauma-informed advisory council will increase the representation and visibility of the diverse history, culture, and experiences often



represented in a classroom through its students. This is essential because when students of color and students with disabilities, especially Black students, see themselves reflected in the curriculum, they feel a sense of belonging and validation. This can foster a sense of pride and empowerment, leading to increased engagement and motivation in their academic pursuits. By incorporating a more inclusive and representative curriculum, we can help to dismantle systemic barriers and create a more equitable and just education system for all.

Respectfully,

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