

**DEB PATTERSON
STATE SENATOR/SENADORA ESTATAL
DISTRICT 10/DISTRITO 10**



OREGON STATE SENATE/SENADO DEL ESTADO DE OREGON

17 February 2025

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee on Rules,

For the record, my name is Deb Patterson, and I am the State Senator for District 10, representing South and West Salem, Monmouth, and Independence. I am here today to strongly urge your support for Senate Bill 450, which would designate November 14 as Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day in Oregon.

At the age of six, Ruby Bridges made history as the first Black child to attend the previously all-white William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans on November 14, 1960. This was not by chance—Louisiana had been slow to comply with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that ruled racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. A state-mandated entrance exam was used to determine whether Black students could enroll in white schools. Ruby was one of only six children who passed.

Her first day of school was met with intense resistance. Four federal marshals escorted her as she walked past an angry mob of protesters shouting slurs, throwing objects, and holding signs opposing integration. Parents pulled their children out of school, and Ruby spent much of the year as the only student in her classroom, learning from the one teacher who agreed to stay. Despite daily threats and isolation, Ruby never missed a day of school. Her story remains a powerful reminder of the courage required to break barriers and the ongoing importance of ensuring every child has access to a welcoming and supportive learning environment.

By establishing Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day, Oregon would join a growing national movement to honor her legacy and promote dialogue about respect, bullying, and the importance of learning from history. Already, school districts across the country and in Oregon have embraced Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day. In 2024 alone, eleven elementary schools in the Salem-Keizer School District celebrated, with more expected in the coming years.

Recognizing this day statewide will not only encourage Oregon's students to engage in meaningful conversations about American history, civil rights, and the progress we have made as

a nation but also promote safe and inclusive school environments. Furthermore, it aligns with our state's commitment to fostering respect, tolerance, and equal opportunities for all children.

SB 450 is a simple yet significant step toward ensuring that future generations understand the sacrifices and bravery of those who paved the way before us. I urge the committee to pass Senate Bill 450 to honor Ruby Bridges' enduring legacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deb Patterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deb Patterson