

Testimony on HB 4079

Submitted to: Oregon Legislative Assembly

Bill: HB 4079 (2026 Regular Session)

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Capacity: Individual / Local Government Perspective

Introduction

Education Committee Context

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Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I serve as a City Councilor in Forest Grove, where I work closely with school districts, first responders, nonprofit providers, and families navigating real-world safety challenges. I am offering these comments in my individual capacity, informed by local governance experience and direct engagement with school administrators who will be responsible for implementing HB 4079 if enacted.

I share the sponsors' stated goals: *no one should be afraid to go to school*. My concern is not with those values, but whether HB 4079, as drafted, advances them in a manner that is operationally sound, mitigates a foreseeable risk for administrators and designees, and does not redistribute cost to school districts—an unfunded mandate.

My testimony focuses on three questions directly relevant to the Education Committee's jurisdiction: 1. How HB 4079 reallocates risk and liability to school districts 2. Whether the bill creates verifiable identification mechanisms and reporting system; and 3. Why existing state emergency and civil defense powers are not incorporated as implementation tools.

CAUTION: Parents and residents now stand guard around schools with whistles, on alert for immigration enforcement operations, organizing to protect their communities. This will inherently create different standards of 'verified' federal agents when residents are tracking federal agents' every move that may contradict with school reporting. Numerous false reports are published on social media and unnecessarily provoke fear and disruption to administration and teachers.

Executive Summary

HB 4079 is framed as a student safety measure, but in practice it functions as a new compliance and communications mandate for school districts that does not reduce risk, does not prevent enforcement activity, and does not provide funding or capacity.

School districts already maintain comprehensive emergency response plans. HB 4079 overlays a parallel, prescriptive framework that introduces new legal training, notification, translation, reporting, and monitoring requirements—without clarifying verification standards or providing resources.

Key concerns raised by districts include:

- **No reduction in fear drivers:** The bill does not limit or coordinate federal enforcement activity near schools. It regulates response after fear is introduced, not prevention.
- **Operational safety risk:** Administrators and designees are placed at the point of tension, potentially perceived as “anti-enforcement,” without protection or guidance.
- **Undefined and unworkable mandates:** The requirement to notify the “community of the school” is undefined and impossible to fulfill consistently.
- **Inconsistent safety doctrine:** Schools do not publicly report lockdowns or police staging because it can increase risk; this bill uniquely elevates federal enforcement to a public notification trigger without safety justification.
- **Escalation of absenteeism and disengagement:** Mandatory notifications risk accelerating chronic absenteeism, academic regression, and loss of contact with vulnerable families.
- **Unfunded mandate:** The bill adds another reporting, monitoring, and compliance system with no appropriation.

Bottom line:

HB 4079 increases administrative exposure, liability, and educational disruption without improving physical or psychological safety. If the Legislature’s intent is truly “that no one is afraid to go to school,” the bill requires clarification, safe harbors, and funding—or a fundamentally different approach.

I. Agreement on the goal, concern with the mechanism

I agree with the principle repeatedly stated by supporters: *no one should be afraid to go to school*. That goal is shared by educators, parents, and local officials across the state.

The concern is whether HB 4079 advances that outcome—or whether it unintentionally increases fear, disruption, and educational harm by shifting responsibility onto school districts without changing the underlying conditions that create risk.

II. Existing emergency response frameworks already exist

School districts are already required to maintain comprehensive safety programs, including procedures for lockdowns, lockouts, secure perimeters, and external threats.

Districts note that:

- existing emergency plans **could be amended** if clarity is needed,
- rather than creating a standalone statutory regime with unique rules, triggers, and reporting requirements.

By layering a separate policy, training schedule, notification mandate, and reporting obligation, the bill:

- fragments emergency management,
- introduces parallel chains of decision-making,
- and increases the risk of confusion during high-stress incidents.

This does not strengthen safety; it complicates it.

III. Administrators and designees placed at foreseeable risk

HB 4079 requires districts to designate administrators and alternates to:

- verify federal credentials and legal authority,
- interact directly with federal agents,
- and serve as the public-facing point of response.

Districts have raised a clear concern: **these individuals may be perceived as obstructing or opposing enforcement**, particularly in highly charged environments.

That perception places administrators:

- at physical risk,
- at reputational risk,
- and potentially at risk of harassment or targeting.

The bill provides **no security guidance, no indemnification, and no safe harbor** for staff placed in this role.

IV. Conflict between community surveillance and school verification

In many communities, parents and residents already stand watch near schools—using whistles, texts, and social media to alert one another to suspected immigration enforcement.

HB 4079 does not address:

- what constitutes “verified” presence,
- how schools should respond when community alerts precede confirmation,
- or how to manage contradictions between community reports and school findings.

Administrators are left to choose between:

- delaying notification and being accused of concealment,
- issuing unverified notices and risking panic,
- or contradicting community alerts and escalating tension.

This is a conflict of command and information flow created by statute.

V. Undefined requirement to notify the “community of the school”

The bill requires notification not only to students and families, but to the “community of the school,” a term that has no definition in statute or practice.

Districts have no established:

- boundary,
- distribution list,
- or consistent method to reach such a “community.”

This creates an obligation that is impossible to fulfill uniformly and exposes districts to compliance risk regardless of their approach.

VI. Inconsistent safety logic compared to lockdowns and emergencies

Schools do **not** publicly notify communities when:

- a school enters lockdown or lockout,
- police are staged nearby,
- or an external threat is being assessed.

This is intentional: public notification during evolving safety events can increase risk.

Districts are asking a reasonable question: **Why does federal enforcement uniquely rise to the level of mandatory public reporting when other, often more immediate threats do not?**

The bill offers no safety-based rationale for this distinction.

VII. Exacerbation of absenteeism and educational harm

Districts warn that mandatory notifications may unintentionally:

- spike absenteeism,
- accelerate academic regression,
- and increase loss of contact with students and families.

Even the *perception* of enforcement near a school can lead families to:

- keep students home,
- disengage from communications,
- or disappear from the system entirely.

Oregon is already struggling with chronic absenteeism and academic recovery. Any policy that increases fear-based disengagement works against those goals.

VIII. Another reporting and monitoring system—without funding

HB 4079 effectively requires districts to:

- track incidents,
- document notifications,
- maintain records,
- and support state-level annual reporting.

Districts are clear: this is **another compliance and monitoring system**, layered onto many others, without funding.

For small, rural, and understaffed districts, this is not marginal—it is cumulative.

Conclusion

School districts are not resisting clarity. They are warning that HB 4079:

- increases administrative and personal risk,
- duplicates existing safety frameworks,
- accelerates absenteeism and disengagement,
- and imposes unfunded mandates—**without improving the safety conditions on the ground.**

If the Legislature's intent is truly that no one is afraid to go to school, then the policy conversation must focus on prevention, capacity, and trust—not solely on notification and documentation after fear has already entered the building.