

Written Testimony in Support of HB 4079 – Safeguarding Students and Families

Submitted by: Yessica Hardin Mercado

Community Member, Parent, Former Educator, and School Board Director (testifying in a personal capacity)

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Yessica Hardin Mercado. I am an Oregon/Washington County resident, an HSD parent, a former educator, and a school board director. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 4079 as a member of my community and in my personal capacity, not on behalf of my school board or district.

I am also the daughter of immigrant parents.

I want to begin there, because immigration policy is often discussed in abstract terms, laws, enforcement, jurisdiction. But for families like mine, and for families I serve today, these policies show up in very real, human ways.

I have personally experienced an encounter with immigration enforcement. I know what it feels like when your sense of safety disappears in an instant, when fear takes over, and you are left wondering what comes next, who to trust, and whether everyday places will remain safe.

My children attend a school that was highly impacted by ICE presence in the surrounding neighborhood. This experience was widely reported and disrupted daily routines, attendance, and the sense of safety for students and families. During that time, fear was not theoretical. It showed up as students missing school, parents afraid to drop their children off, and educators trying to reassure students while they themselves lacked clear guidance on what to do or say. The confusion was palpable. The emotional toll was real.

As a former educator, I deeply relate to what teachers and school staff are feeling in these moments. Educators are asked to be anchors of stability for students, which is to create safe, predictable environments, yet without clear statewide standards, they are left navigating fear, misinformation, and high-stakes situations alone. That is an unfair burden to place on those whose primary role is teaching and caring for children.

HB 4079 matters because it brings clarity where there is currently uncertainty. It establishes clear expectations around transparency, communication, and response so that schools are not improvising in moments of crisis. It allows educators to say, "Here is what we know. Here is what we do. Here is how we keep students safe."

This bill is not about taking sides in a political debate. It is about recognizing that schools are different. They are not just buildings, they are communities. They are where children learn how

to trust institutions, where families form relationships with educators, and where stability is essential for learning to happen.

For those who may be unsure about this bill, I ask you to consider this: fear does not improve public safety. Uncertainty does not help children learn. And placing educators in the position of navigating enforcement situations without guidance does not serve anyone well.

Clear, consistent standards help everyone (students, families, teachers, administrators, and law enforcement), understand roles, boundaries, and expectations. That clarity strengthens trust, and trust is foundational to safe, thriving communities.

At its core, HB 4079 affirms something simple but profound: that children deserve to feel safe at school, that families deserve transparency, and that educators deserve guidance when faced with complex and emotionally charged situations.

I urge you to support HB 4079 and ensure that Oregon schools remain places of learning, dignity, and stability; for all families.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Yessica Hardin Mercado

Community Member, Parent, Former Educator, and School Board Director
(Testifying in a personal capacity)