

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 4079 Before the Oregon House Committee on Education
February 2026

Dear Chair Dobson, Vice-Chair McIntire, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Linda Thai, and I am a resident of Multnomah County and a parent of children in Portland Public Schools. I urge you to support House Bill 4079, which would require school districts and institutions of higher education to adopt clear policies for responding when ICE or other Department of Homeland Security officials attempt to enter school property.

This bill is essential for three reasons: protecting student wellbeing, upholding constitutional rights, and preserving the educational mission of our schools.

PROTECTING STUDENT WELLBEING

Schools must remain safe havens where every child can learn without fear. When ICE conducts enforcement operations at or near schools, the impact on students is profound and well-documented.

Studies show that children exposed to immigration enforcement experience increased rates of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and declining academic performance. A 2017 study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that Latina adolescents in communities with high immigration enforcement rates had significantly elevated stress hormone levels—even when they themselves were U.S. citizens. Fear affects concentration, memory, and the ability to learn.

When students don't know whether ICE might appear at school, chronic stress follows them into every classroom. Students report being unable to focus on lessons because they're watching the doors. Some stop attending school altogether. Parents keep children home on days when rumors of ICE activity circulate.

HB 4079 would require districts to establish transparent policies that provide predictability and protection. When families understand how their school will respond to immigration authorities, it reduces fear and allows students to focus on learning. This is not a political issue—this is about basic child welfare and educational equity.

UPHOLDING CONSTITUTIONAL AND PRIVACY RIGHTS

This bill protects fundamental legal rights that apply to all students and families, regardless of immigration status.

The Fourth Amendment protects against unreasonable searches and seizures. Schools have the authority—and the obligation—to require judicial warrants before granting immigration agents access to school buildings or students. Without clear policies, administrators may unwittingly violate students' constitutional protections by allowing warrantless searches or seizures.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits schools from disclosing student information, including immigration status, without parental consent or a court order. Yet without training and clear protocols, school staff may not know they have the legal right and duty to refuse ICE requests for student records or information.

HB 4079 empowers schools to protect these rights by requiring them to establish procedures in advance. It ensures that schools know when to request warrants, how to protect student privacy, and what legal standards apply. This benefits everyone—students, families, and school personnel who deserve clear guidance on their legal obligations.

Written policies also ensure accountability. When procedures are documented, schools can demonstrate they acted lawfully and protected students' rights. This protects school districts from legal liability while ensuring consistent, fair treatment of all families.

PRESERVING SCHOOLS' EDUCATIONAL MISSION

Schools exist to educate children—all children. When immigration enforcement occurs on school grounds, it fundamentally disrupts this mission.

Under *Plyler v. Doe*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that all children, regardless of immigration status, have the right to a public education. Oregon has reinforced this commitment through state law. When ICE operates at schools, it creates a chilling effect that undermines this legal guarantee. Families begin avoiding schools. Attendance drops. Parent engagement declines.

Parents should be able to drop off their children, attend conferences, and participate in school activities without fear of detention. When they cannot, schools lose the family partnerships essential to student success. Teachers lose contact with parents. Students lose support at home.

Furthermore, when parents are detained at schools, children face immediate crises. They may be left without supervision or separated from caregivers with no safety plan. HB 4079 ensures schools have protocols to protect children during such emergencies, coordinating with child welfare services and ensuring no child is abandoned or left in danger.

Immigration enforcement at schools also places impossible burdens on educators. Teachers and administrators are education professionals, not immigration officials. They should not be put in positions where they must choose between protecting their students and complying with federal requests. Clear policies protect school personnel from these untenable situations.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS

Some may worry this bill interferes with federal immigration enforcement. It does not. Federal authorities retain their enforcement powers. HB 4079 simply requires schools to have policies that respect legal rights, protect children, and maintain educational environments.

Other states and districts have successfully implemented similar policies. They've found that clear protocols actually improve cooperation with law enforcement when necessary, while protecting students and maintaining trust with families.

CONCLUSION

House Bill 4079 is a commonsense measure that protects Oregon's students while respecting federal authority. It requires schools to do what they should already be doing: establishing clear policies that uphold constitutional rights, protect child welfare, and preserve schools as safe educational spaces.

Every child in Oregon deserves to attend school without fear. Every parent deserves to participate in their child's education without risking detention. Every educator deserves clear guidance on how to protect their students' rights and wellbeing.

The question before you is simple: Will Oregon's schools be places of learning and safety for all children, or will they become sites of enforcement and fear?

I urge you to stand with students, families, and educators by supporting HB 4079.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda Thai

Portland, OR