

Testimony in Support of Oregon House Bill 4079

Oregon Legislature – House Committee on Judiciary

Paulita Peña
Salem, Oregon

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Paulita Peña. I am a Mexican American, Lipan Apache mother of five, wife to a recently disabled farm labor worker, a state employee, a farm labor contractor, and a union leader. I serve as Co-Chair of the SEIU International Indigenous Peoples Caucus, sit on the SEIU 503 Immigration Committee, and am a member of both the SEIU 503 Latino Caucus and the SEIU International Latino Caucus.

I'm here today in strong support of House Bill 4079, because the bill's clear legislative language directs school district boards and governing bodies of institutions of higher education to adopt policies that address how the school district or campus will respond when a federal immigration authority enters public education property. This establishes statewide expectations, consistency, and protections for students, families, staff, and community members in these deeply vulnerable moments.

I support this bill with a heavy but steadfast heart, because my family embodies the very realities this bill seeks to address:

My oldest son (27) is married and became a father on January 12, 2026. One of the youngest District Sales Directors for Coke-a-Cola on the West Coast.

My second son (25) is married, a full-time student studying law and accounting, and works full time in finance.

My third son is a Certified Nursing Assistant, studying nursing, working in hospice care and at Stayton Hospital.

My fourth son is a senior at North Salem High School, in JROTC, and recently enlisted in the U.S. military, preparing to leave for boot camp after graduation.

My youngest son (9) attends St. Mary's/Regis Catholic School.

Despite every one of us being U.S. citizens, every one of us carries proof of citizenship because we understand what happens when documentation isn't immediately visible, whether in schools, in transit, or interacting with authorities. We live in this reality. We prepare for fear because we must.

I have had to have conversations with my children that no child should ever have to have; including with my youngest, who recently asked me if we're soon going to have to wear a badge "like Jewish people did in Germany in 1939." A 9-year-old should not understand what it means to plan for his own disappearance, who to call, when to go live on social media, or how to document his safety if he doesn't come home.

My youngest knows about MMIP – Missing and Murdered Indigenous People. He knows how to name non-family emergency contacts first, which relatives to call second, and how to document locations. These are survival conversations, not childhood lessons.

My fourth son, who has committed to serve this nation, should not have to fear that wearing the uniform of the United States could make him a target when he steps off a high school campus or enters a public space. But that fear is real, lived, discussed, and carried in our home every day. I should be able to tell him that the law protects him unequivocally. I cannot do that with confidence I should.

HB 4079's language requiring school boards and governing bodies to adopt clear, consistent policies for when federal immigration authorities enter school property or campuses is a step toward ensuring that protections are meaningful in practice not just in theory.

This bill is about predictability, safety, and dignity for every student and every family. It says to every child, "Your school has a plan. Your safety matters. You will not be alone in fear."

For my sons, for my grandchild, and for every Oregon family that deserves to live without fear and without profiling us, I urge you to pass House Bill 4079.

Thank you.