

My name is Emerson Cochran and I am currently a resident of McMinnville, Oregon and a student in the Master of Social Work program at Portland State University. I currently work with youth aged 12-20 years old who are unhoused and have been working alongside my fantastic classmates to bring awareness and assist youth and families who are undocumented.

In my daily work, I walk youth through hard conversations about identity, peer relationships, parental conflict, and the hard realities of life. I am writing to you not only for myself, but on behalf of the youth I work with,

More and more lately, my colleagues and I have also been talking to our kids a lot about ICE. Youth have reported being scared to go to school because there are rumors that ICE will appear or have not wanted to participate in group activities because we are going outside and there has been ICE presence in the area. No matter how prominently we display our sign expressing that ICE is not welcome in the area and that we do not open the door for ICE, there is still fear and anxiety, specifically for monolingual Spanish-speaking youth. I have also been speaking with my classmates about this issue, and there has been similar anxiety felt by youth and families across communities.

Youth, especially youth of color, are not given the same rights and opportunities that adults are given, and while I am writing this as a student passionate about caring and support of immigrant populations in the state of Oregon, I am also here because the youth that I work with are not given these opportunities to speak to legislators about the impact this has on them. Youth deserve transparency, advocacy, and knowing that they are safe within their educational buildings.

Youth and families deserve transparency, and this includes an understanding of policy and procedure if an ICE agent arrives at a school. Not only does this affect youth that are taken into custody of ICE, but it affects other students and instills fear in a place that is supposed to be designed for learning and growth. Having a policy in place that can be explained to students and to parents may alleviate some of the anxiety by allowing parents and students to ask questions and to process the ongoing ICE presence in our state.

Thank you, Senator Frederick, for your time and consideration. Your consideration on this matter and on the wellbeing of our state's youth is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Emerson Cochran, BSW
McMinnville, Oregon