

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

For the record, my name is Sarah Wofford, and I serve as State President of the Oregon School Employees Association, representing 25,000 classified school employees across Oregon. I am here today in support of House Bill 4079. Our members are the people who open the doors every morning and close them every night. They drive the school buses, serve the students' meals, support students in classrooms, clean and maintain our buildings, and staff the front offices. They are often the first adults a student sees when they arrive at school and the last when they leave. When uncertainty or fear enters a school building, our members are on the front lines.

HB 4079 is about clarity and safety. It asks school districts and public colleges to adopt clear, written policies for how they respond if federal immigration authorities seek to enter school property. It does not change federal law. It does not prevent lawful enforcement. What it does is ensure that school districts have plans so that responses are consistent, legally sound, and focused on keeping students safe and functioning. For classified school employees, the absence of clear policy creates risk. Front office staff can be placed in the impossible position of deciding, in real time, how to respond to a federal agent. Bus drivers may not know what their obligations are if approached in a parking lot. Principals, secretaries, and custodial staff should not have to improvise under pressure. Clear policy protects employees as much as it protects students.

Our members serve every child who walks through the door. They do not check immigration status before offering help. They do not ask about documentation before cleaning a classroom or serving a meal. Their job is to create a stable, welcoming environment where students can focus on learning. When families fear that schools are unpredictable or unsafe, attendance drops, engagement suffers, and the burden on staff increases. We have seen in recent years how quickly rumors and uncertainty can spread through a school community. A single incident, whether real or perceived, can disrupt an entire day of instruction. Students become anxious. Parents flood the front office with calls. Staff are left trying to reassure families while also doing their regular jobs. HB 4079 helps prevent that chaos by requiring districts to think through procedures ahead of time and communicate them clearly.

From a workforce perspective, this bill is also about protecting employees from being put in the middle of situations they are not trained to handle. Classified staff are not immigration lawyers. They are not federal agents. They deserve policies that clearly define who responds, how documentation is verified, and how to ensure that lawful processes are followed without disrupting students or putting employees at risk. Oregon has long recognized the importance of safe and welcoming schools for all students. HB 4079 reinforces that principle by ensuring that responses to federal immigration activity are deliberate and consistent, rather than improvised. It provides guardrails so that districts act within the law while minimizing trauma and confusion in school communities.

For OSEA members, this is about stability. It is about knowing that when something difficult happens, there is a plan in place. It is about ensuring that schools remain places of learning, not fear. And it is about respecting the role of the classified workforce in maintaining order, safety, and trust in our buildings. On behalf of the 25,000 classified school employees we represent, I respectfully urge your support for House Bill 4079. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.