

TESTIMONY in Support of SB 2972

Submitted to the House Committee on Judiciary

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Chair Baker, Vice chair Olson and Williamson, and members of the committee, thank you for your time and the opportunity to submit testimony to you today. My name is Carli Rohner, and I coordinate prevention and advocacy services for Willamette University.

My work serving the students of Oregon spans just over a decade, in both public and private liberal-arts schools, mid-sized to small residential campuses, universities where the student population is comprised of mostly first generation students, to those comprised of student's whose families experience with higher education spans generations. I have worked with students who have never left their home state of Oregon, those who have traveled internationally for the opportunity to study in the United States, and students from all across our nation. In addition to my roles as a prevention specialist and advocate, I have served as advisor to LGBTQ student organizations, fraternities, multi-cultural service groups and male athletic organizations.

I highlight this collection of experiences within our Oregon higher education system to illustrate the breadth of diversity and identities that make up the student population we serve, and speak to the necessity of our systems to account for that diversity in a compassionate, trauma-informed manner.

Though each student I work with is unique in circumstance and background, students that are weighing the benefits of reporting their experiences with violence to their university share many common concerns. One of these students described the feeling of unease with the university reporting system so aptly, saying that "it's like standing at the edge of a river, and if you jump in you don't know what's downstream. You know you don't like what is going on at the bank, and if you jump in it could end up okay, but it could also just end up really bad". Because of this lack of knowledge, some students choose not to report, fearing what they could experience "downstream".

This common concern of "What happens next?" is layered with those unique identities and experiences described earlier in this testimony. And because of this, the barriers to participating fully in a conduct process are as unique as the students themselves.

I have worked with DACA students whose anxiety surrounding the conduct process stemmed from their past experiences involving systems of authority that they perceived to be punitive to people of their status. I have worked with male survivors who worried that by participating in the conduct process, other people would perceive them as weak or a liar, damaging their ability to participate in sports that they had played and loved since childhood. I have worked with students who grew up in a household where they experienced domestic violence, where reliving the experience of a judicial-like process (in this case, the conduct process), brought up too much for them to cope with and still be successful in their academics.

In each of these cases, students wanted desperately for the university to, at minimum, be aware that they had been harmed. Each wanted to report. And in each of these cases, the idea that reporting to the university might force them to speak about and relive one of their worst life experiences for anywhere up to 60 days was too much to bear (especially on top of their studies and the challenges of navigating college life).

At Willamette, our students that report violence have the opportunity to do any of the following:

1. Report, and never participate in the conduct or follow-up processes (allowing their report to speak their experience for them).
2. Report, and participate fully in any subsequent processes.
3. Report, participate, and withdraw their participation at any point in the process, allowing their past participation (interviews, reports, etc.) to speak to their experience.

Students that allegedly have committed acts of violence have the same opportunities to participate fully, participate and withdraw from the process at any time, or not participate at all in the conduct process.

When students that I work with learn that they can metaphorically get in the river (in this case, the conduct system) by reporting, and that they can exit the river at any time, the relief they experience can be visceral, no matter their identities or background. It has been my experience that these survivors go on to participate more fully with their university conduct processes, and experience less negative personal outcomes (like PTSD, dropping out of school, etc.). In the field of violence prevention and response, we know that survivors and universities have better outcomes when student survivors are provided the opportunity to fully understand their options, and trust the process that they choose to participate in.

It is because of this I urge you to fully support HB 2972, and in turn the students of Oregon among those most in need of our assistance. Thank you for your time and service.