

# EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

## Mayor Vera Katz Asks City Flags Flown At Half-Staff

Mayor Vera Katz is asking for all city flags to be flown at half-staff for the this week in honor of the memory of the Littleton, CO high school shooting victims.

"The magnitude of violence in Colorado is overwhelming. I've ordered all city flags lowered in honor of the victims and their fami-

lies," said Katz. "I also hope that when we see the flags at half-staff, it will remind us that we must be ever-vigilant in working to prevent youth violence."

Katz also held a moment of silence for the shooting victims at the beginning of the morning City Council session.

## Drop-Out-Or-Drive Bill Adopted

A student's ability to receive and keep a driver's license was linked to school attendance under a bill adopted by the Senate SB 487, sponsored by Sen. Peter Courtney (D-Salem), requires students seeking their initial driver's license to provide a document from their school to the State Motor Vehicles Division (DMV) stating they are currently enrolled in school. The bill provides exemptions for students who are home-schooled, working towards their General Education Diploma (GED) or who can show that they are exempt from school attendance due to circumstances beyond their control.

SB 487 also allows school dis-

tricts to adopt a policy to notify the DMV when a student drops out and to require the DMV to suspend that student's driving privileges.

During the Senate floor debate, Sen. Courtney said, "This bill is a wake-up call to students. It says, 'If you want to drive, stay in school.'"

Other members of the Senate argued the bill went too far and would do nothing but encourage students to drive without a license. "This bill won't guarantee kids will stay in school; it will guarantee more people driving without a license," said Sen. Marylin Shannon (R-Brooks).

The bill passed the Senate 19-11. It is now before the House Education Committee.

## Statement by the President

I want to begin by saying that Hillary and I are profoundly shocked and saddened by the tragedy in Littleton, where two students opened fire on their classmates before apparently turning their guns on themselves.

I have spoken with Governor Bill Owens and County Commission Chair Patricia Holloway and expressed my profound concern for the people of Littleton. I have spoken to Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder, who, along with Attorney General Reno, is closely monitoring the situation. I've asked the Attorney

General and the Secretary of Education to stand ready to assist local law enforcement, the schools, the families, the entire community during this time of crisis and sorrow.

A crisis response team is ready now to travel to Colorado, and I strongly believe that we should do whatever we can to get enough counselors to the families and the children as quickly as possible. I know the other communities that have been through this are also ready to do whatever they can to help.

I think that Patricia Holloway would not mind if I said that, amidst

all the turmoil and grief that she and others are experiencing, she said to me just a moment ago that perhaps now America would wake up to the dimensions of this challenge — if it could happen in a place like Littleton, and we could prevent anything like this from happening again, we should. We pray that she is right.

We don't know yet all the hows or whys of this tragedy. Perhaps we may never fully understand it. St. Paul reminds us that we all see things in this life through a darkly lit glass, that we only partly understand what is happening. We do know that we must do

more to reach out to our children and teach them to express their anger and to resolve their conflicts with words, not weapons. And we do know we have to do more to recognize the early warning signs that are sent before children act violently.

To the families who have lost their loved ones, to the parents who have lost their beloved children, to the wounded children and their families, to the people of the community of Littleton, I can only say that the prayers of the American people are with you.

Thank you very much.

## Legislative Highlights

### 'Spanking' Bill Restores Corporal Punishment In Schools

Corporal and other forms of physical punishment will be restored in Oregon schools if a bill passes the House Education Committee.

HB 2828, sponsored by Rep. Jeff Kropf (R-Halsey), allows boards to adopt policies that include using corporal, work and physical punishment to discipline unruly students and restore order. As defined in the bill, "corporal" punishment means spanking. "Work" punishment means cleaning, serving or other kitchen or cafeteria duty, or cleaning classrooms and other school ground areas. "Physical" punishment includes, but is not limited to, requiring a student to do push-ups, run laps, hold books or sit in the corner.

To use this type of discipline, a school district must comply with the following requirements:

- Adopt a policy outlining the types of discipline allowed in the school district;

- Provide notification to each parent, through the student handbook, of the district's policy and require each parent to acknowledge receipt of the notification;

- Provide a consent form to parents, which must be returned to the district, allowing them to specify which types of punishment the school district may use on their students.

The policy adopted by the school district must state that no corporal, physical or work punishment may be administered unless the student's parent has consented to the particular type of punishment.

Only the school principal or assistant principal can administer corporal punishment. A witness must be present and the punishment videotaped.

Testifying in support of his bill, Rep. Kropf said, "This bill is necessary because, sadly, the continuing breakdown of the family and the general moral decay of society have resulted in some children not being taught the fundamental concepts of respect for authority and behavioral accountability. These children exhibit behavior that puts other children and teaches at risk of physical violence, mental distress from intimidation and other harmful conduct. The unruly, dangerous behavior prevalent in today's classrooms must be stopped."

Testimony opposing the bill argued that corporal punishment is not the answer to discipline problems with children. The punishment allowed under the bill, the opponents stated, would do more harm to the student and the student's well-being than any benefit the student may receive.

To that argument, Rep. Kropf replied, "This bill will help children who exhibit these types of behavior at an early age to understand that there are consequences for their actions. I believe some children can learn from corporal punishment, while to others it may be detrimental because of their home life or leaning disabilities. That is why parental involvement is vital to a successful discipline policy."

No further action on HB 2828 is currently scheduled by the House Education Committee.

### School Uniform Bill Debated

School districts may require students to wear uniforms under a bill heard in the Senate Education Committee.

SB 751 allows school districts to adopt policies requiring students to wear school uniforms or to prohibit students from wearing gang-related clothing. If a district adopts a uniform policy, the uniform must be selected by the principal, staff and parents of the students attending the school. Parents must be given six months' notice before the policy begins. The bill also allows parents to make a written request exempting their student from the policy.

The chief sponsor of the bill, Sen. John Lim (R-Gresham), said, "School districts need to have the ability to keep order in the classrooms and allowing school districts to adopt policies on school uniforms may help. Additionally, violence in the schools is on the rise and if school districts can eliminate gang-related clothing, I believe that may help alleviate some of the violent behavior in our schools."

Testifying on the bill, ODBA Senior Legislative Advocate Jim Green told the committee, "while we support the idea, we do not believe the bill is necessary. School

districts currently have either a school uniform or dress code policy. The Lake Labish Elementary School here in Salem, for example, has had a successful school uniform policy in place for over a year. School districts currently have the authority under law to do exactly what this bill states."

Other groups voiced some concern with the bill. A representative of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) testified, "Clothing is a form of speech which is protected under the constitution. School districts need to move very cautiously before banning clothing or adopting a school uniform policy. Any policy in this area needs to ensure that parents and students can opt-out of the policy at their request. While this bill has such an opt-out provision, we believe it needs to be clearer."

No further action on SB 751 is scheduled.

### Use Fuel Tax Break Clears Committee

The bill exempting school districts and ESDs from paying Oregon's use fuel (diesel) tax cleared another hurdle this week in the Senate Revenue Committee. It was earlier approved by the Senate Trans-

### Bill Requires Board Policy On Management Of Violent Students

School boards will be required to adopt policies on managing students who display violent tendencies under a bill considered by the House Education Committee.

HB 3444 dictates that school districts adopt policies requiring the following:

- Immediate removal from the classroom of any student exhibiting a tendency toward violent behavior;
- Placement of the student in a setting where the behavior will receive immediate attention; and

- A mental health examination by a licensed counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist before allowing the student to return to the classroom.

The bill also requires school districts to budget funds necessary to implement the above mandated policies.

Opposing the bill, OSBA Senior Legislative Advocate Jim Green said, "This bill will have dramatic and negative financial impacts on school districts. Mandat-

ing school districts to provide a mental health examination does not make sense for every student who exhibits a violent tendency. While necessary in certain cases, there are limits. And we should not be expected to do these examinations without the students' full support and consent of the student's parent." Green also indicated the bill may violate federal law. "Under federal special education law, we cannot unilaterally change disabled students' placements just because they exhibit violent tendencies. There are certain due process rights guaranteed under federal law to these students and their parents. This bill simply goes too far."

The House Education Committee was scheduled to discuss the bill again on Monday, April 19. While it is unlikely the bill will move forward in its current form, its supporters are preparing amendments to address some of the concerns raised.

### Firearm Safety Course Mandate For All Students Considered

School districts will be required to teach firearm safety to all their students under a bill heard by the House Education Committee.

HB 3012 would require districts to offer a firearm safety program in at least one class per semester for each grade level. The program for K-6 students must be approved by a national organization with an interest in firearm safety and instruct students on what to do if they discover a firearm in an unsupervised setting (e.g., the National Rifle Association's "Eddie the Eagle" program). The grade 7-12 program must include a course in which handgun competency necessary to obtain a concealed handgun license is taught.

Rep. Ron Sunseri (R-Gresham), the bill's chief sponsor, proposed amendments changing many of the above requirements. Under the

amendments, each district is required to implement a firearm safety program only if requested by a local law enforcement agency or local medical provider. The amendments still require districts to set aside time in the school day for firearm safety instruction.

Opposing the bill and its amendments, OSBA Senior Legislative Advocate Jim Green said, "This bill mandates a curriculum onto local school districts. While the amendments improve the bill, it still robs valuable time during the school day from instruction that is directly linked to student achievement of our academic standards. Curriculum decisions should be made at the local level, not mandated by the state legislature."

HB 3012 is not currently scheduled for further hearings.

### Bill Prohibits Hiring Relatives

School districts will be prohibited from hiring relatives of school board members under HB 3008 heard this week by the House Education Committee.

Sponsored by Rep. Jeff Kropf (R-Halsey), the bill prohibits school board member relatives from being employed by the school district or serving on any 21st Century Schools Council in the district. It defines "relative" as a spouse, child, brother, sister, parent, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece,

first cousin, grandchild, grandparent, stepchild, sister-in-law or brother-in-law.

Rep. Kropf read a letter from one of his constituents alleging collusion between school board members and their school employee relatives. No school district or individual names were given, nor were any of the allegations substantiated.

The hearing on HB 3008 was closed without further testimony. No further action on the bill is expected.

use fuel taxes paid in on this bill, probably sometime this October. According to the Legislative Revenue Office, the refunds will amount to \$3.3 million over the next two years.