

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)**  
*Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Hearing*  
“Defending Faith and Families Against Government Overreach: Mahmoud v. Taylor”  
Tuesday, February 10, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

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Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Public K-12 schools across the country are, right now, facing a deluge of crises that affect the safety, security, and academic future of students. According to Sandy Hook Promise, nearly four-hundred thousand children have experienced gun violence at school since the turn of the century – that’s far more than any other developed country. Some kids go to school with built-in bullet shields in their backpacks, and parents live in fear that their child might not come home.

Children across the country are also experiencing trauma at the hands of their own government as ICE rips families apart and preys on people near schools and hospitals. Right now, educators are asking me what to do when ICE agents appear on school grounds. They are sharing stories of children distracted by fear, families afraid to ask for help, and staff struggling to support students who are carrying adult-sized burdens into the classroom. One superintendent told me about a 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom where every student had a story about being afraid of ICE. These stories are heartbreaking, and they demand our attention and action.

And as our communities experience this overwhelming fear, Donald Trump and Secretary McMahan continue to illegally dismantle the Department of Education (ED). Students who experience discrimination are left without recourse since Secretary McMahan has implemented a mass reduction in force that essentially emptied the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). And a new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report confirmed that the agency has dismissed 90 percent of the discrimination cases that have been filed.

Add post-pandemic loneliness, device addiction, gun violence, and social media addiction — it paints an alarming picture for both K-12 education and the overall well-being of our nation’s children. This Committee, and especially this subcommittee, has a responsibility to help children thrive regardless of their neighborhood, their family income, or, according to the United States Supreme Court in 1982, immigration status.

Instead of addressing these many real dangers to students, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are once again turning classrooms into the epicenter of their culture wars to the detriment of students and families.

No one is arguing that parents should not be involved in their children’s education. I know that firsthand, because I was an active parent volunteer for years and know firsthand that family involvement is critical to a child’s development and educational success. We all agree on that. Unfortunately, instead of focusing on community schools or other support that would help students succeed, today’s hearing will further perpetuate a culture of fear and censorship. Instead of having meaningful discussions about how to improve education or conducting oversight on what’s left of the Trump Administration’s Department of Education, Republicans are using “parental rights” as another means to undermine public education.

Students deserve to learn all the nuances and intricacies of the world around them in an age-appropriate manner. Preventing students in public schools from learning certain material based on the religious objections of a vocal minority sets a dangerous precedent. Further, it increases the administrative burden on already resource-strapped schools and educators who fear retribution for teaching about topics that some might think of as controversial, such as world religions, classic literature, African American history, evolution, climate science, and the history of the LGBTQ+ community.

Inclusion is not indoctrination. Differences exist in the world around us and part of a good education includes teaching students about tolerance and understanding. Banning books or preventing students from learning about differences only serves to perpetuate a culture of hatred and fear.

I do want to note some hypocrisy here. Countless times, in this committee, my colleagues say they want to give education back to the states. I've heard that numerous times over the years, and for the most part, they are talking about curriculum. As we have repeated again and again in this committee, the federal government is not in charge of curriculum or what books are in schools. If parents don't like books or curriculum, they can go to the school board and ask for a change. And if they don't like the School Board's decision, they can elect a new school board. That's the kind of local control I thought my colleagues wanted.

My Democratic colleagues and I are committed to fighting against the politicizing of education. We will continue to work with students, parents, educators, and communities until every student receives an accurate and high-quality education in a safe, well-funded environment without fear of gun violence or masked federal agents breaking down the classroom door.

I look forward to the conversation, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the balance of my time.