

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: Feb. 24, 2009

CONTACT: Kevin Finney, Public Policy Director

(503) 221-1054, ext. 204

kfinney@emoregon.org

Press Release

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon praises Legislature for passage of HB3686 *Repeal of religious dress restrictions on teachers ends a long period of religious discrimination and reflects the increasing religious and cultural diversity of Oregon*

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) today issued a statement praising the Oregon Legislature for passage of HB 3686. HB 3686, when signed into law by Governor Kulongoski, will repeal an 87-year old statute that prohibits public school teachers from wearing religious garb. David Leslie, EMO executive director, said:

The Legislature, in passing HB 3686, has struck a blow against religious discrimination and has said that our children deserve the very best teachers—regardless of religious attire. Although there were many concerns expressed about this legislation at the outset, over time most legislators came to see that the mere wearing of religious apparel need not compromise the religious neutrality of our public schools. We were particularly gratified that the legislation won broad bipartisan support in both houses, and we believe its passage sends a positive message about the increasing religious and cultural diversity of Oregon.

Leslie went on to express appreciation for several individual officials and organizations that supported repeal of ORS 342.650.

We especially want to recognize the leadership exercised by House Speaker Dave Hunt, who introduced this legislation, and the contributions of Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian and Superintendent of Instruction Susan Castillo who called for a repeal of this statute early in the debate. We thank the many legislators of both parties who supported HB 3686. We also thank the many religious and secular organizations that contributed to this victory, including the Oregon Family Council, Northwest Religious Liberty Association, Urban League of Portland, Islamic Society of Greater Portland, Portland State University Muslim Student Association, Muslim Education Trust, Bilal Mosque Association and Jewish Federation of Greater Portland. Nationally, the work of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Sikh Coalition helped to rally a broad interfaith coalition of national organizations in support of repeal.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy. Please note: The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland releases all public policy statements through the Oregon Catholic Conference.