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**Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon applauds call to repeal ORS 342.650,
which prohibits religious dress worn by public school teachers
Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian and Superintendent of Public Instruction
Susan Castillo issue letter urging repeal of statute**

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) announced today that it supports efforts to repeal ORS 342.650, a state statute restricting public school teachers from wearing any “religious dress” in the conduct of their duties. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon has also sent a letter of appreciation to Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Susan Castillo, who today issued a joint letter calling for the repeal of Oregon’s religious garb statute.

“We have been meeting with representatives of a number of different religious traditions for several months about this issue,” said EMO Executive Director David Leslie, “and we are convinced that this restriction on religious apparel is discriminatory in its effect and is unnecessary to insure a public school atmosphere that is religiously neutral. Therefore, we would welcome legislation in the February 2010 Session to repeal ORS 342.650. We appreciate the leadership exercised today by Commissioner Avakian and Superintendent Castillo in calling for a repeal of this statute.”

Responding to possible concerns about repeal of the statute, Leslie stated, “We support the separation of church and state and the free exercise of religion—and we recognize that sometimes they come into conflict, but in this case the so-called ‘religious garb’ statute is excessively restrictive.” Leslie continued, “Oregon is one of only three states that has such a statute. It ends up reducing religious diversity in our schools and excluding teachers from certain religious traditions.”

EMO recognizes the need for continued dialogue on this issue, and also believes that efforts to repeal this statute result from a positive reflection on the increasing religious and cultural diversity of Oregon.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations—including Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox bodies—congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.

MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

African Methodist Episcopal Church » American Baptist Churches of Oregon » Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) » Christian Methodist Episcopal Church » Church of the Brethren » Community of Christ
Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon » Episcopal Diocese of Oregon » Evangelical Lutheran Church in America » Greek Orthodox Church » Presbyterian Church (USA)—Presbytery of the Cascades
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) » Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland » United Church of Christ » United Methodist Church » Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches