

DOJ says it will investigate Eugene swim class

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A Department of Justice official said she plans to investigate Eugene over a swim class.

On Jan. 6, U.S. Assistant Attorney General Harmett Dhillon reposted an X post from popular conservative account “Libs of TikTok” showing a photograph of a flier for a BIPOC water safety class offered by the City of Eugene. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous and people of color.

Dhillon, who directs the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, said she “will investigate” the class, saying it may be a “racially discriminatory government program” and therefore illegal.

According to Eugene’s recreation catalog the “BIPOC Water Safety & Lifeguard Cohort” lets BIPOC youth aged 12 to 18 “increase their water safety and water competency skills” in preparation for the lifeguarding classes.

Ian Campbell, spokesperson for Eugene’s Library, Recreational and Cultural Services Division, told the Register-Guard that 2026 will be the third year the city offers the class, which he doesn’t believe is discriminatory.

Campbell cited CDC data that shows Black youth ages 10-14 are more than seven times as likely to drown as their white peers, and Black teens aged 15-19 more than five times as likely to drown.

“These differences are not about interest or ability, but are instead linked to access,” Campbell said. “Many youth from historically underrepresented communities face barriers to swimming lessons and aquatics programs, including cost, limited access and environ-



Swimmers do laps in the Sheldon Pool in 2022. A class aiming to reduce barriers to swim proficiency offered by the City of Eugene could be investigated by the Department of Justice, according to a post on social media.

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ments where they may not feel welcome or supported.”

Campbell said the class is designed to address those barriers and the department views the program “as both a drowning-prevention strategy and a youth workforce development opportunity that strengthens overall community safety.”

Demond Hawkins, president of the Eugene-Springfield NAACP, had a similar perspective.

“This is less about exclusion and more about ensuring that historically underserved communities have meaningful access to resources in ways that are safe, effective and responsive to their lived experiences,” Hawkins said.

Hawkins compared the BIPOC swim

class to if the city offered a free swim class for seniors to reduce fall risk and improve mobility.

“Programs like these often emerge in response to gaps that universal approaches have not adequately addressed,” he said. “No one would call (such a senior program) discriminatory.”

Campbell said while the program is designed to support BIPOC youth, no one is turned away based on race. And, he added, the class is one of many swim classes offered by Eugene’s recreation division, with Eugene Rec also offering “programs designed for women, older adults and participants with disabilities through adaptive programming, alongside a wide range of general program-

ming that are open to everyone.”

Campbell said the online attention gathered by the Libs of TikTok post has generated a “recent uptick in calls and emails” from people outside the area, but this hasn’t yet resulted in threats or harassment of city employees.

Elle O’Casey, spokesperson for the City of Eugene, said as of Jan. 8, the DOJ had not contacted the City Attorney’s office about the program.

A spokesperson for the DOJ said the department had no comment beyond Dhillon’s post.

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