

February 6, 2019

Representative Margaret Doherty, Chair
House Education Committee

RE: Support House Bill 2191



Chair Doherty and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Lori Riddle. I'm a student at Hillsboro High School in Hillsboro, Oregon. I'm a member of Students for a Healthy Oregon and I'm here today to ask for your support for House Bill 2191.

House Bill 2191 is important because students are being forced to hide what is going on with them. By not treating mental health and physical health the same, it is telling students that what is going on with them is not important enough, and adds to the stigma around mental health. This bill will help equalize the importance of mental health to physical health. This will also help students open up about their mental health issues and concerns instead of students being ashamed or hiding what is going on. This may even help students seek treatment for what they are experiencing. 1 in 5 children age 13-18 have, or will have a mental health condition, and students in Oregon are suffering. With mental health not being recognized an excusable absence, we as students are not being allowed to makeup essential aspects of our grade, these include homework and even tests at some schools. As a result, the student's grades slip, which causes even more stress or anxiety and continued harboring of their condition.

Last year I was diagnosed with a mental health condition. I would have severe panic episodes some days before, or during school. But in fear of my absence not being excused my mother and I would have to make up something in order for it to be excused. We would claim I had an appointment or that there was a family emergency and that's why I would either be late to school or need to be pulled out of school. Having experienced this first hand, I can assure you that equalizing mental and physical health is essential to the overall wellness and academic success of students across Oregon. I am lucky to have a team of support at my school who allow me to learn to manage my condition so that I am not afraid to speak on it anymore, but I know that a lot of students do not. House Bill 2191 is a step in the right direction for those who do not.

Thank you for your time, and allowing me to share a little bit of my story with you. House Bill 2191 has the power to change the way we view mental health in our schools. It has the ability to show students that what they are facing is not something they need to be ashamed of, or that they need to hide. Reducing the stigma around mental health is key for our schools and communities, and this is an opportunity to break down one of the many barriers around it. Thank you.