



Preventing Substance Abuse & Suicide

Testimony for Public Hearing
House Committee on Health Care
February 7, 2019

Oregon State Legislature
House Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

Re: House Bill 2667 – Plan to Prevent Adult Suicide

Chair Representative Greenlick and Committee Members of the House Health Care Committee:

My name is David Westbrook and I am the Chief Operating Officer at Lines for Life. This afternoon I am testifying in favor of House Bill 2667. HB 2667 will create a strategic statewide plan to prevent suicide in adult populations and establish a position within OHA to focus on preventing suicide.

Lines for Life's mission is to prevent substance and suicide and promote mental wellness. We are the Oregon affiliate for the National Suicide Prevention Line and the only non-governmental agency to answer America's Veterans Crisis Line. We answer Oregon's statewide alcohol and drug helpline and military helpline. We operate a senior loneliness line and we provide after-hours support to numerous community mental health providers. Last year, across all of these lines, we answered over 110,000 calls, chats and texts. We also provide training in suicide intervention and produce Oregon's suicide prevention conference.

Oregon needs this bill because suicide is the leading cause of death for Oregonians 25 – 44 years old. It is the second leading cause of death for Oregon adults 45 – 54. And, it is one of two reasons that is cited by the CDC for why life expectancy in the US has gone down for a third year. An adult specific plan is critical because in Oregon approximately 90% of all suicides are by those 25 years old and older.

In Oregon suicide disproportionately impacts our rural communities. Overall Oregon is, sadly, well above the national average of 13.5 deaths per 100,000. Our Oregon rate hovers around 18 per 100,000. In the rural county with the highest death by suicide rate that number averaged 55 per 100,000 between 2013 and 2016. Nearly everyone of our rural counties have higher suicide death rates than our urban counties.

Each person who dies by suicide has a ripple effect. Research suggests their death touches at least six other people. These are family members, friends, and co-workers who are frequently traumatized by the suicide. We are losing parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters to this nearly silent epidemic.



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In addition to the deep emotional impact that suicide has on families, workplaces and communities. It is estimated that suicide cost Oregon \$834,385,092 in 2018.

Despite the loss, we are not doing enough to prevent loss of life by suicide in adults. The last time that we had a comprehensive suicide plan that addressed any adult population was the 2006 Oregon Older Adult Suicide Prevention Plan. It does not appear that Oregon has ever had what it needs, a plan to address suicide across the lifespan. HB 2667 begins to move Oregon in the right direction of preventing a leading cause of preventable death in Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David E. Westbrook". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Westbrook, COO
Lines for Life