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**SB 584: Oregon Safe to Learn Act
Senate Committee on Education
February 25, 2019**

Chair Wagner and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of the Oregon Safe to Learn Act: SB 584. I am Colt Gill, Director to the Oregon Department of Education.

In my travels around the state with the Joint Committee on Student Success, I have heard students, families, and school staff express safety and inclusion concerns due to harassment, bullying, intimidation, or feeling marginalized based on protected class status. This committee also heard many instances where a student's family and life circumstances impacted their learning.

In 2017, more than 9% of 8th graders reported not going to school at least one day in the previous 30 due to safety concerns (2017 Oregon Healthy Teen Survey). Nearly one in three 8th graders – and over one in five 11th graders – reported having been bullied at school in 2017 (2017 Oregon Healthy Teen Survey). More than 30% of Oregon 8th graders in 2017 reported feeling “so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks in a row” that they “stopped doing some usual activities” (2017 Oregon Healthy Teen Survey). Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youths aged 10 to 24 years in Oregon in 2017 (Oregon Health Authority, 2018). 239 shootings have occurred at schools nationwide since 2014, resulting in 138 deaths (Gun Violence Archive, 2018) U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, found that 78% of students who committed acts of school violence exhibited a history of suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts at some point prior to their attack. The study also found that targeted violence offenders often claim to have been bullied and alienated from their peers, family and the world at large

In addition to keeping our children safe and well - academic achievement and positive attitudes improve, and behavior problems decrease when schools invest in social and emotional learning.

SB 584 directly addresses these concerns. I have worked with the Oregon School Safety Task Force on this bill over the last year. SB 584 supports the agency's focus on safe and effective schools. It complements the provisions found in SB 12, which you passed out of committee.

The goal is to identify risk factors and intervene early, rather than wait for absenteeism rates to rise, graduation rates to decrease, or, tragically, for another suicide or school shooting.

For example, nearly 80% of students who commit acts of school violence exhibited a history of suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts at some point prior to their attack. The signs exist—we just need to pay attention to them and intervene.

SB 584 contains four main elements supported by national experts to promote student mental wellness and safety:

1. Implement effective and culturally responsive bullying and harassment prevention programs.
2. Promote student mental wellness and enhance effective youth suicide prevention and wellness promotion programs.
3. Use of a multidisciplinary student safety assessment team and regionalized system to help identify, assess, and support students who may be in crisis or present a potential risk for violence.
4. Promote the statewide use and implementation of Oregon’s statewide school safety tip line (SafeOregon).

This bill, together with SB 12, will go a long way in making our schools—and our students—safer and provide an equitable environment where everyone can focus on learning and ensure that every student has the support they need to thrive.

We know that passage of this bill is just the first step. Responsible, culturally responsive implementation is key to its success.

The bill calls for the State Board of Education to consult with the Oregon Health Authority, representatives of school districts, education service districts, school employees, human services, mental health professionals and law enforcement agencies, to adopt rules related to the system required under this section.

In this process ODE is committed to stewarding an inclusive coalition to approach this work with an equity lens to ensure we take an approach that is culturally responsive and trauma

informed to reduce bias and improve student and family inclusivity in their neighborhood schools.

We see this coalition expanding to include student and community voice, specifically to ensure the multidisciplinary student safety assessment system includes anti-profiling safeguards, culturally competent care, and meaningful youth involvement in rule development and program implementation.

We look forward to the opportunity to implement SB 584 and SB 12 in tandem. These bills create supports and an elevated voice for students that does not currently exist in our system.