



Human Services

Helping real people make real change

Testimony in Support of Investments in Student Health Needs & Suicide Prevention

March 13, 2019

Dear Co-Chairs Beyer and Nosse and Members of Ways & Means Human Services Subcommittee:

On behalf of Umatilla County as the Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) and one of the Community Mental Health Programs (CMHPs), I would like to recommend prioritizing behavioral health services within our schools, expanding youth suicide prevention, intervention and postvention policies and programs promoting resiliency.

Umatilla County is committed to offering services within schools that promote behavioral health resiliency. The RISE (Resiliency, Inspirational, Success, Education) program is integrated into all schools in Umatilla County offering behavioral health skills that support social and emotional learning. We offer skills training in small groups and individually to students who have been identified by schools as needing additional supports. This 2018/2019 school year, we have served over 1,000 youth. Our success is due to strong relationships with schools, Intermountain Educational School District (IMESD) and our local CCO, GOBHI. We are honored to support and build resiliency in students and within schools.

In rural counties such as ours, where school districts are very spread out, services availability is limited to certain areas, and poverty is the norm; we find creative ways to meet the needs of our citizens. One way is through the CARE program. CARE works directly with schools, IMESD, and community partners such as our CMHP, faith based, and non-profit organizations, to assist families and children to get needed services. Funding for CARE is braided from IMESD, schools, and GOBHI. We are very proud of CARE because it builds relationships between families, schools and community partners that builds resiliency within the family and improves the quality of lives of our citizens.

Umatilla County also supports the Oregon Health Authority's POP 402, suicide prevention, as a top priority. In 2016, 2017 and 2018, Umatilla County and our schools experienced youth and adult suicides that shook our communities. Since this time, school districts, CMHPs and Public Health have come together to address suicidality. Our county has engaged in Connect training, preparing us to plan and implement a postvention plan. This type of plan is ever changing and requires strong involvement by all. Umatilla County Rise and substance use disorder programs are serving students in the school by engaging them in meaningful activities and skills groups to build resiliency. We work in concert with each school, delivering services that are culturally specific and targeted towards their needs.

Umatilla Counties RISE program, CARE program, IMESD and schools will continue our work together to deliver prevention services; as is true of other counties who work with their schools. Prioritizing what to fund and what is most important to Oregonians is a daunting task of the legislature that does not go unnoticed. Funding behavioral health services within schools must be a top priority if we want to improve school, family, community, county and state health.

Sincerely,

Amy Ashton-Williams
Director, Umatilla County Human Services

Umatilla County Human Services
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