



ASSOCIATION OF OREGON
COMMUNITY MENTAL
HEALTH PROGRAMS

Testimony in Support of SB707

May 14, 2019

Good Afternoon Chair Salinas and Committee Members-

My name is Annette Marcus and I serve as staff to the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide, which is coordinated by the Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs. I am here today, on behalf of the Alliance, to speak in support of SB707 which would put the Alliance into state statute. Members of the Alliance to Prevent Suicide are appointed by the Oregon Health Authority and include subject matter experts from the public and private sectors, key leaders from state agencies, subject matter experts, evaluators, legislators such as Senator Sara Gelser and Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer, loss and attempt survivors, representatives of groups at higher risk for suicide, and young people.

In 2017 we lost 107 young people, age 24 and younger, to suicide in Oregon. An additional 750 youth were hospitalized for suicide attempts or serious risk of suicide¹. We have the 17th highest rate of youth suicide in the nation and suicide is the second highest cause of death for young people in our state.

Youth suicide is a difficult topic without a simple solution that Oregon has begun to address in a thoughtful and comprehensive manner.

In 2014, HB4124 established the Suicide Intervention and Prevention Coordinator in the Oregon Health Authority and mandated development of a 5-year Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan (YSIPP). Reducing suicide requires a comprehensive, multi-system, community-based approach. This Plan determined that an advisory group of subject matter experts, key evaluators and people with lived-experience should be formed both to advise OHA and to facilitate successful implementation of the Plan. To meet this need, the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide was formed. The Alliance is only in the Plan itself and is not in statute.

This YSIPP, based on national best practices and local knowledge, has provided a blueprint for action in our state. More than an advisory group, the Alliance has been instrumental in moving the plan forward by developing stronger linkage between state and local efforts, working to ensure that effective suicide prevention and intervention policies and practices are addressed both in public policy and local practice settings. Just a few examples of the innovative approaches the Alliance is helping to facilitate include:

- The Family Acceptance Project which addresses the crucial need for family support to LGBTQ youth.

¹ Per OHA's 2018 Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Report

- Sources of Strength, an evidence-based upstream prevention approach in schools which helps to create a positive school culture with youth leadership in partnership with caring adults.
- Connect postvention trainings and planning in 15 counties, which provide communities with the specialized knowledge to develop effective responses to a youth suicide and limit the possibility of contagion
- Successfully advocating for legislation to improve practice in hospital emergency departments so that young people and their families receive follow up caring contacts after a behavioral health crisis. Alliance members are now closely tracking and supporting implementation of this legislation so that youth and families are receiving the help they need.

At its core, the Alliance is working with a wide range of concerned citizens to create a new normal in Oregon for youth and families to:

- Promote a sense of **hope** and nurture resilience.
- Normalize **help**-seeking behaviors and support individuals and systems to ensure that the **right help** is available at the **right time**.
- Foster community **healing** after an attempt or suicide in order to prevent contagion.

SB707 will ensure that this crucial effort is sustained when state and local leadership positions change and the political will to remain focused on youth suicide prevention and intervention ebbs and flows.



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