

February 10, 2020

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RE: House Bill 4145 (2020) (Threats to Schools and Places of Worship)

Dear Chair Sanchez and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to voice my support for House Bill 4145 (2020). This bill is sponsored by Representative Courtney Neron and drafted in partnership with Safe Neighborhoods for Oregon, a non-profit that supports common sense solutions to ensure safe communities to live, work and raise families.

During the Reynolds High School shooting I lead the incident command center, so I know from firsthand experience how important intervention and communication is in order to stop a person from acting out in a violent manner. This bill seeks to prevent escalation in violent behavior from individuals who threaten schools or places of worship by ensuring they have access to mental health treatment and supervised probation. This could have helped save two teen lives, had this been in place!

In the current climate where threats against schools and places of worship are increasingly common, I believe we should do all we can to ensure that when a threat is made we respond in a way that keeps our community safe and provides resources and mental health treatment for people who need it.

We unfortunately know from years of data across the nation that the vast majority of individuals who commit an act of mass violence made threats beforehand that were not adequately addressed. According to a Secret Service Report analyzing acts of mass violence at schools from 2008 to 2017, 83% of perpetrators “shared verbal, written, visual, or video communications that referenced their intent to carry out an attack, threatened the target, and/or threatened others.” (U.S. Secret Service, Protecting America’s Schools, pg. 45, 2019).

Although I am writing as a private citizen, I work in a school district and oversee mental health supports in schools. This need has only increased for students. Schools and families cannot be expected to provide all of the support for this growing issue. We need your help.

Today this House Judiciary Committee and the Legislature has an opportunity to make a difference, to save lives and to respond to threats sooner. I ask that you take action and pass House Bill 4145. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brenda Martinek

