



Testimony SB 563 –Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

March 2, 2021

Dear Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Anderson and Committee Members:

I am submitting testimony in support of **SB563** on behalf of the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide. The Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide advises the Oregon Health Authority on implementation and development of the statewide Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan. Its 48 members are appointed by the director of OHA and include leaders from the public and private sectors, legislators, subject matter experts, suicide attempt and loss survivors, and young people from across the state of Oregon.

Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide

Vision : In Oregon all young people have hope, feel safe asking for help, can find access to the *right* help at the *right* time to prevent suicide, and live in communities that foster healing, connection, and wellness.

Mission : The Alliance advocates and works to inform and strengthen Oregon’s suicide prevention, intervention and postvention policies, services and supports to prevent youth and young adults from dying by suicide.

SB563 changes the statute relating to youth suicide to include all young people below the age of 24, rather than limiting it to ages 10 to 24. Sadly, this change is needed because a small number of Oregon children under age 10 have died by suicide in recent years. We don’t know the exact number in Oregon as the data currently being collected starts at age 10. SB563 will ensure that OHA is able to accurately report these numbers. This will help us to understand the scope of this issue and develop more effective responses.

Elementary age children benefit from prevention efforts to build resilience and social emotional skills, but our schools, behavioral health and health care systems also need thoughtful planning regarding intervention and treatment for those who are actively struggling with suicidality. It is also important that our suicide prevention planning includes support for young children after a suicide occurs in their family or circle. Providing therapeutic and other supports after the loss of a parent or other significant person in a child’s life is a key prevention strategy. Research shows that losing someone to suicide increases the long-term risk of the loss survivor dying by suicide.¹

We urge you to support SB563.

Sincerely,

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¹ Guldin, M.-B., Li, J., Pedersen, H. S., Obel, C., Agerbo, E., Gissler, M., . . . Vestergaard, M. (2015). Incidence of suicide among persons who had a parent who died during their childhood: A population-based cohort study. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 72(12), 1227–1234.