

03/08/2021

House Committee on Behavioral Health

Ref: HB 2315

Chair, Vice-Chairs, and Committee Members:

Thank you so much for this opportunity to share my experience and for your consideration of HB2315. My name is Kate Mollinedo. I'm 17 and a YouthLine volunteer. In my day to day life and in my role as a volunteer talking to people in crisis, I regularly interact with the people that this bill would affect. My friends, contacts I've had at YouthLine, and myself would benefit directly from professionals being trained in suicide assessment, treatment, and management. Without access to trained professionals, many young people are unable to get the help that they need and counselors in schools are at a loss as to how to help us best. I would like to share some short stories from my experience as a volunteer and from my personal life to explain my position in favor of HB2315.

When one of my best friends was suicidal, the first adult I turned to was our school counselor. I told them I was worried for her safety and asked them for help. In response, they listened to me, and tried to talk to my friend. However, no one else was notified, and they never contacted my friend again after our initial conversation. Our counselor was clearly unprepared for a report that a student was at risk of harming themselves, and my friend remained in danger despite our counselor's good intentions.

Another time I experienced the effects of a lack of training around suicide was when I reached out for myself. I was recovering from being suicidal at the time and looking for a therapist. However, when I disclosed details of my suicidality in a survey, one therapist decided not to see me because they didn't feel they had the training to treat a patient with suicidal thoughts. This made it harder for me to access care and the delay was hard for me emotionally.

When contacts reach out to me through YouthLine, one pattern I have seen is hesitancy to trust the professionals they should be able to turn to, and this lack of trust is not without reason. Contacts often share similar stories to me, of unprepared counselors and not knowing if anyone would be able to help them with something as overwhelming as suicidal ideation. With proper mandated training for health professionals, young people like the contacts that reach out to YouthLine with concerns about their mental health would be able to get the help they need much more easily and would have reason to trust the counselors in their schools. Training would empower professionals to properly care for suicidal individuals while also empowering those struggling to reach out for themselves. Lives could be saved in the process. For all those reasons, I testify in favor of HB2315.

Respectfully,

Kate Mollinedo

YouthLine Volunteer Legislative Committee

Resident of Beaverton, Oregon