

8 March 2021
House Committee on Behavioral Health

Ref: HB 2315

Chair, Vice-Chairs, and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Rayleah Trice. I am a senior at Woodland High School in Washington and I volunteer at Youthline, a teen to teen crisis line, open daily through call, text, and chat to talk with teens who are struggling from 4pm-10pm PST. Whether they are working through a mental health crisis, thoughts of suicide or self-injury, or any other issues we support them through their immediate feelings by creating safety and self-care plans. One aspect of safety planning for someone struggling with suicidal thoughts includes finding an adult support in that person's life, whether it is a family member like a parent or another adult like a school counselor or doctor. Going through these kinds of struggles is hard, especially if the person feels like they have no supports in their life. These adults are there to guide this person through their unique struggles and while we all want to help the ones we love, some issues are just too big to tackle alone. This is why continuing education around suicide prevention is so important.

After talking with teens who are struggling with thoughts of suicide, it's hard to send them off to work through the steps of their safety plan without having that certainty that they will be supported and can stay safe. Having these conversations are scary and the bravery that these people show when they reach out is so amazing, but reaching out over text to a stranger is different than telling a counselor or doctor about their true feelings. Having someone who's real and who will be there for that person makes it more difficult to be open and honest about how they might be feeling. This is part of where the prevention training would bridge that gap.

Being able to recognize an "invitation" to talk about suicide is one thing, but acting on it is another. Mental health is something that is still stigmatized and being straightforward when asking someone if they are thinking about suicide is not easy. These educational opportunities would not only break down the stigma around these topics, but would also better allow caregivers to approach the teens who might be struggling behind closed doors. Being able to have these open and honest conversations about what that person is going through would allow for better care and a safer environment for both sides involved. Overall continuing education around mental health and suicide prevention can only help and it's something that all people who deal with youth and young adults should consider.

Respectfully,

Rayleah Trice
YouthLine Volunteer
Legislative Committee Member