



Health Department

March 9, 2021

House Committee on Education
900 Court St. NE - Remote E
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 2368 - Relating to pilot program for trauma-informed approaches

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chairs Neron and Weber, and members of the Committee, my name is Jessica Guernsey and I am the Public Health Director for Multnomah County Health Department. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2368 which will provide an opportunity for school districts to partner with their staff, behavioral health specialists, and culturally-specific organizations to support a more conducive learning environment for all students.

We are in strong support of the -1 amendment that specifies the use of culturally-responsive practices and clarifies that partnering with culturally-specific organizations means organizations that are primarily staffed and led by members of the community served. Connection to culture is key to cultivating safety and healing and has been shown to be a strong protective factor for student resilience and wellbeing. This is a critical addition to the success of this program.

It will also be important to ensure that the trauma-informed practice supported by this pilot explicitly addresses racial trauma and racism experienced by students and staff both within and outside of the school walls. The RFP for these projects should acknowledge the particular trauma that racism, historical and present day violence inflict on communities of color, and ask that applicants integrate an anti-racism framework into the trauma-informed practices and plans. Not doing so, and ignoring the racialized trauma existing in school environments, this program will miss the mark in supporting increased resiliency within their school community. Naming racism, and transforming processes and structures that uphold the white supremacy will be critical to assuring that the school district's work does not reinforce and replicate sources of trauma for students of color.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Jessica Guernsey, MPH
Public Health Director
Multnomah County Health Department