

Salma Sheikh
House Committee on Health Care
RE: Support HB 2591

March 18, 2021

Chair Prusak, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the House Committee on Health Care,
My name is Salma Sheikh, and I use she/hers pronouns; I am a First-generation Somali American Muslim Woman and I live in Multnomah County. I am a member of the Oregon School-Based Health Alliance Student Health Advocates, an organization whose mission is to strengthen school-based health services and systems that promote the health and academic success of young people. As a student, I am in strong support of HB 2591 which ensures better support for youth's needs by providing more school health services that address the very different health issues of local communities.

School health services are more important than ever. Many students and families have long relied on school-based health centers to provide regular preventive, primary, and behavioral health care to youth. One reason SBHCs are so held so dearly, especially to us youth is that they are in a special position not only to help alleviate mental health problems among other health issues with youth but also to provide treatment or give appropriate resources. Evidence shows students with either public or no health insurance are more likely to access SBHC health services. Around 79 of the 197 school districts in Oregon do not even provide any school nursing services.

Furthermore, according to the document shared by OSBHA, black, Indigenous, People/Youth of Color are already being disproportionately impacted, and school health resources are often their only link to effective services. Social unrest, systemic and historical racism, and the loss of jobs and resources caused by COVID are only increasing this trauma. COVID-19 has shown us that we need to make an even greater commitment to setting up health systems in schools, particularly for students and families most impacted. As schools reopen, many students will not have had access to health care and medication, and some will be facing new levels of trauma, anxiety, and stress as a result of the pandemic.

When I first joined OSBHA, my knowledge about the importance of school-based health centers was limited but through all my involvement with OSBHA, I have learned firsthand the great significance that SBHC holds. They are so critical to so many youth in Oregon and all around the US as they provide Although I do not commonly use SBHC, I do know it would make my life much easier as it's hard to go to doctor appointments because my parent would have to take off and I would miss school. There is a need SBHC's are helping mitigate these issues youth are facing.

Thank you,
Salma Sheikh