

March 24, 2021

Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

RE: Support Senate Bill 782

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thomsen, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Leina McLaughlin. I'm a student at Sherwood High School in Sherwood, Oregon. I'm a member of Students for a Healthy Oregon and I'm here today to ask for your support for Senate Bill 782.

Senate Bill 782 is extremely important, specifically, I'm passionate about this bill because it will open conversations around mental health in high schools, provide avenues to diagnoses for students previously unable to get the help they need, and aid in taking some of the pressure off of educators to get teens help for mental health; all three of these will move together to reduce the deaths of despair and student mental illnesses that are a chronic problem in Oregon high schools. Oregon is among the poorest ranked for mental health, ranking 11th for the highest suicide rate in the nation, in 2018 more than 900 Oregon youth ages 10 to 24 years were hospitalized for self-inflicted injury or attempted suicide, statistics we cannot bear to see and must work to change, and we believe Senate Bill 782 will be the first step towards these necessary solutions.

Personally, I would've loved to have these mental health checks at the beginning of my high school years. I really struggled with panic attacks and anxiety, it took me until sophomore year to get into therapy and get the help I needed, I just wish I had known what to do about my struggles earlier. And this isn't an uncommon story either, one of my close friends struggled severely with depression-like symptoms, yet she had parents who didn't believe her calls for help for months. I spent weeks trying to devise a plan to get her help, trying to find someone she could go to. Had Senate Bill 782 been in place, she would've had the ability to establish a connection with a community health partner and alert the school to her problem through the mental health check, directly taking the pressure off of her and me, two young students who were severely unprepared.

Through Senate Bill 782 I see a means to awareness and support for mental health in schools. I urge you to pass this bill and tell students everywhere that their mental health is valid and deserves to be taken care of. I hope you will pass this bill with every teenager who is struggling in mind, knowing that this will be a hugely important step for the mental health of students across Oregon. Thank you for spending the time to listen to us, we are so appreciative of your commitment to bettering teen mental illness.