

March 23, 2021

Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair  
Senate Committee on Education

RE: Support Senate Bill 782

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Rory Petersen. I am a student at Oregon Charter Academy in Corvallis, Oregon and I am a member of Students for a Healthy Oregon. I come before you today to ask for your support on Senate Bill 782.

Senate Bill 782 is important. A few years ago, my very good friend was unenrolled from our high school due to truancy. Fourteen year old me thought the reason my friend stopped coming to school was because she did not want to put effort into school work--that she would rather give up than try at all. It seemed like she was disappearing. In reality, she could not force herself to get out of bed let alone regularly attend classes. Our school made a couple phone calls to my friend's mom, but did nothing to really reach out and keep her from falling behind. My friend was heading in the wrong direction, which led to being another number on the high school dropout list; a collection of kids with potential who ended up vanishing.

A major symptom of depression is lack of motivation. The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), a department under the United States National Library of Medicine, studies depression. In "Depression: Overview" the NCBI says, "People who have depression fall into an emotional black hole for weeks or months, and often can't see any way out,". My friend was going through this and there was no one to pull her out of it. If Senate Bill 782 existed then the school could have run a screening on her; they would have caught her depression before it got to the point of her dropping out.

Senate Bill 782 will help catch students who are developing depression from becoming high school dropouts or killing themselves; it will set them back on track. According to the 2019 Oregon Health Associations Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan Annual Report in 2018 one hundred and twenty nine youth committed suicide. With the isolation and trauma of the covid-19 pandemic we can all agree that help is needed even more than ever.

This bill can save some of those young lives. It can rescue disappearing teenagers. Your vote in favor is a prayer answered from Oregon teens. To save youths like my friend, pass Senate Bill 782.

Thank you,  
Rory Petersen