

HB3254 Testimony by Representative Susan McLain

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chairs Neron and Weber, and members of the committee thank you for your time. For the record, my name is Susan McLain and I represent House District 29, spanning Western Washington County, including Forest Grove, Cornelius, and West Hillsboro.

The Albertina Kerr Center and Oak Grove Academy both provide an invaluable service to my community. Specifically, these residential treatment sites serve students with co-occurring mental health and developmental disabilities. Not only are these programs designed to deal with academic and behavioral issues, but they provide high-quality mental health services to students in need. They offer a safe environment to students who may be unsafe in typical school environments. And the programs serve students locally in their own communities and have transitioned many students back to their old neighborhood schools successfully.

These invaluable services now face a loss of funding through no fault of their own. The loss of funding comes, not through any decision about the worth or merit of the programs, but simply because of a change in the interpretation of the funding statute defining 'Long Term Care and Treatment'. That funding is needed to hire special education teachers, mental health specialists, and in order to provide high-quality academic support. Funding and then de-funding the program leaves our students stranded and the school districts left with a large funding deficit. That deficit would have a wide-ranging impact on all students in Forest Grove.

I urge the members of this committee to recognize the invaluable services these programs provide to vulnerable students and to vote to continue funding these programs so that children with co-occurring mental health and developmental disabilities get the help they need and deserve. Please pass House Bill 3254. Thank you.