



May 07, 2021

TO: Senate Education Committee

FR: Cassie Kenney EdD LMFT, Forest Grove School District

RE: Testimony in support of House Bill 3254

Thank you Chair Dembrow and committee members for considering this testimony.

My name is Cassie Kenney and I am the District Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Wellness for the Forest Grove School District, previously I was the Clinical Director and administrator of Oak Grove Academy during the program's development. The purpose of this testimony is to give context to the request to continue to include Oak Grove Academy in programs eligible for Long Term Care and Treatment funding through the Oregon Department of Education. When Forest Grove School District assumed the contract for providing educational services for students residing in Albertina Kerr Center group homes in 2015, it was with several goals in mind. The first was to provide high quality mental health, not solely behavioral or academic, services to students in the program. The second was to focus on the least restrictive educational environment for all students, with the goal of transitioning students back to their neighborhood schools.

The funds long term care and treatment provided allowed us to fund special education teachers, and use other resources to hire mental health specialists to provide program-wide embedded mental health support, alongside high quality academic support targeted to individual student needs. With this targeted support, we have seen students thrive, particularly students who may have been asked to leave previous day treatment placements due to the unique co-occurring nature of their needs.

To misquote a popular movie, "if you build it, they will come". Oak Grove Academy has excelled at providing support to some of our most vulnerable students in Oregon, students who have been identified with co-occurring mental health needs and developmental disabilities. Due to this success, and the dedication of our staff, we have seen Albertina Kerr make choices to move students across the state with the most intensive level of need into residential group homes in our attendance area, and open up a new secure residential group home in the Forest Grove attendance area in September 2019.

We welcome these wonderful students and the opportunity to meet their needs and watch them thrive. However, without continued long term care and treatment funding, a scenario has been created where there is a disproportionately high concentration of students with exceptional needs in Oak Grove Academy's attendance area, and no funding to meet those needs. It would be a detriment to these amazing students and their futures. Please help us rectify this situation and allow us to continue doing what we do best, focusing on the academic and mental health needs of students who attend Oak Grove Academy.