



Date: February 6, 2023  
To: House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care  
From: Stephanie Phillips Bridges, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland  
Re: Support for Suicide Prevention Expansion, HB 2757

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin, Vice-Chair Nelson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie Phillips Bridges, and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 2757. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

In 2021, the Oregon Health Authority's Center for Health reported "893 deaths caused by suicide, ranging from ages 5-85+."<sup>1</sup> According to the Oregon Health Authority's Suicide Prevention site, "suicide is the leading cause of death among Oregonians aged 10 to 24."<sup>2</sup> "Oregon ranked 26 out of 50 states (worse category) for overall child well-being,"<sup>3</sup> according to the 2022 Kids Count Data Book. This ranking was determined by looking at four indicators that impact mental health. Linn County's Mental Health site shares "studies have shown that over 90% of people who die from suicide have one or more psychiatric disorders at the time of their death."<sup>4</sup> The 2022 Kids Count Data Book shares that "in the 2000s, experts estimated that 14%–20% of young people in America were experiencing a mental, emotional or behavioral disorder at any given time. Conditions for the current generation appear to be worse. The coronavirus upended everyday life to an extent not seen since World War II; millions of parents, caregivers, and other adults felt overwhelmed. U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said in 2021 there is a "mental health pandemic" for the youth."<sup>5</sup>

According to federal data collected by the Kaiser Family Foundation, "Oregon has the 5th highest unmet need for mental health services, with more than 10% of adults saying they cannot get the help they need."<sup>6</sup> The Oregon Health and Science University's "Behavioral Health Workforce Report to the Oregon Health Authority and State Legislature in 2022" reports "one of the biggest challenges Oregon faces is a shortage of mental health workers, a problem that was exacerbated by the pandemic."<sup>7</sup> While White

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Health Authority, Center for Health website, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Health Authority, Suicide Prevention website, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022 Kids Count Data Book: State Trends in Child Well-Being, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Linn County, Mental Health website, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022 Kids Count Data Book: State Trends in Child Well-Being, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, Adults Reporting Unmet Need for Mental Health Treatment in the Past Year, 2018-2019.

<sup>7</sup> Oregon Health and Science University, Behavioral Health Workforce Report to the Oregon Health Authority and State Legislature, 2022.



households were dealing with COVID-19 pandemic challenges including mental health crises, households of color had to deal with those same challenges coupled with an increased level of racism. Black adults and youth marched across the nation for Black Lives Matter with the hopes of racial justice and liberation. “The Racism Endemic: Addressing the Impact of a Social Virus on BIPOC Youth” presentation by Providence Children’s Health explains that “racism physically and mentally impacts youth, particularly Black youth. The impacts of racism on mental health include major stress (a traumatic experience) that can lead to internalizing and externalizing problems like anxiety, depression, behavioral disorders, and PTSD. As well as increased depression and suicide ideation, which is even worse among BIPOC youth. Suicide rates among Black youth have increased by 60% for boys and 182% for girls in the past 15 years.”<sup>8</sup> There is a desperate need for suicide prevention services for youth, especially Black youth.

To support suicide prevention, Congress designated 9-8-8 as the new three-digit crisis line for nationwide use, replacing the 10-digit toll-free number that connected callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Network in 2020. The following year, the Oregon Legislature partially enacted 9-8-8 implementation legislation, moving forward with creating two 9-8-8 call centers based in Oregon and partially expanding mobile crisis response teams across the state. However, several key elements were deferred until 2023 to ensure time for thoughtful planning. HB 2757 can fulfill the key elements that were deferred. HB 2757 will expand and provide funding for a coordinated crisis services system including the 9-8-8 suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline. With HB 2757, an unspecified tax will be imposed on consumers and retail subscribers who have telecommunications service or interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol service and who have prepaid telecommunications services, to pay for the 9-8-8 crisis services system. By imposing a variety of small taxes ranging from \$0.50 to \$1.25, there is built-in funding to support a vital service that Oregonians of ages can depend on.

Oregon's youth depend on your support to address the “mental health pandemic”, especially the Black youth across Oregon. We need HB 2757 to achieve timely 24/7 responses for crises in all Oregon communities with a trained and compensated workforce.

Respectfully,

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<sup>8</sup> Providence Children’s Health, The Racism Endemic: Addressing the Impact of a Social Virus on BIPOC Youth presentation by Providence Children’s Health, 2022.