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Representative Courtney Neron
Chair
House Committee on Education
900 Court St. NE, Hearing Room D
Salem Oregon 97301

Good afternoon Chair Neron, Vice Chair Hudson, Vice Chair Wright, Members of the committee,

For the Record my Name is Andy Huwe, and I am the original author of House Bill 2643. I am extremely grateful to the Committee first for expediting this bill to the top of today's agenda. I must apologize in advance because this will be a very emotional hearing, and I will do my best to maintain my composure.

I have two requests of the Committee today, first to rename the Bill "Elena's Amendment." It is important to remember the role of Adi Staub played in passing legislation to protect students who struggle with suicidal ideations. Next, I hope to see an amendment to Section 1 3 B removing my family's name from the plan to keep the focus on the students who will be served, not the person who proposed the legislation.

I am a triplet, the proud sibling to my brother Ben and sister Elea. Ben is diagnosed with ADHD and depression. He received an IEP and 504 plan while attending school. Elena experienced similar academic difficulties as she share Ben's mental health maladies alongside anxiety, borderline personality disorder, and diabetes. While supporting my siblings, my family and I have become intimately familiar with the origin, operation, and success of 504 plans.

Elena's troubles began during the COVID-19 lockdowns. As an extrovert, she was stricken by the sudden loss of social interactions that recharged her. The one difference was our sheltering of one of Elena's friends in the midst of their own mental health crisis that caused us to keep medication and sharp objects secured at home. Her friend moved out later that year, and life began to return to normal as lockdowns eased. After our family moved from Enterprise to Wallowa, we stopped securing medication and other potentially dangerous objects because everyone appeared stable. I had the special privilege of bonding with my sister often as we enjoyed expanded recreational opportunities in the community.

Elena started her Junior year September of 2020, and my school allowed us to attend in person again. But by October, Elena was unable to stay in school longer than 2 hours. That is when the attempts started. Elena in total made four attempts on her own life in a month and a half, the first three a week apart from each other. We were devastated, and we did our best to secure dangerous household objects once again.

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We did everything within our powers to make sure Elena was safe. For the foreseeable future we were with her every second of every day. We had no clue why she had made an attempt on her life. The more time we spent with her, the more distant Elena grew emotionally from me, a condition that has not changed. Elena has not recovered from these attempts, causing irreparable damage to herself physically that require long term medical care. She went on to make 15 more attempts, 5 of which included sending her to the hospital. Once she was sent to a mental hospital in Lewiston, where she told her doctor she had an active plan to take her life.

Agonizing over my sister's journey, I began researching ways to help her because I was tired of feeling powerless over a year of watching her suffer. I ultimately stumbled upon Adi's Act, which I took to the school with to find out what steps had been taken. I submitted the policy to the committee, as well as the draft plan I was able to find. This took me into my own period of anger, sadness, and occasionally self-destructive thoughts.

In my family's opinion, Adi's Act did not go far enough to prevent the type of mental health crisis that Elena experienced. My family interpreted the statute as simply requiring the district to hand a flier with minimal information beyond a prevention hotline number and claim they did their best. Staff at my school district were thankfully counseled in prevention, but the members were unable to offer any real help to Elena.

I reached out to two teachers of Elena's and mine to submit their own testimony to the committee, and you can read a letter from Dana Ingram, one of her instructional assistants. You can see what happened in their own minds around her. My mom, who has submitted her own written testimony, went and met with the Principal of the school when Elena was unable to stay in class to try to discuss formulating a plan to keep her learning on campus. The Principal had no suggestions, and never called my family during the month of school Elena missed due to her struggles.

I appreciate the hours Representative Levy has spent on the phone talking about these issues. I was with her and her staff at an event last November when I received an 11PM call that Elena was heading the hospital in Lewiston. I was also unable to say goodbye to her.

Schools are one of the few social institutions that play a primary role in youth development. Schools host kids 8 hours a day, where the parents have them for the rest. There must be a partnership between the families and schools to ensure students are safe, and to identify signs early on to make sure the students are able to get the help they need. My sister's struggles are not unique to her, and that is why I am asking the legislative assembly to act. Bad mental health causes painful seasons for families, and involving all stakeholders in protecting youth experiencing mental illness is the best solution for suffering students.

Thank you Again for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Sincerely,

Andrew Huwe