

DATE: March 20, 2023

TO: Representative Rob Nosse, Chair
Representatives Christine Goodwin and Travis Nelson, Vice-Chairs
Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

FROM: Julie Scholz on behalf of the Oregon Pediatric Society Board of Directors

SUBJECT: Support for HB 2002 – Access to Medically Necessary Care

The Oregon Pediatric Society (OPS), the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), writes this testimony to state our strong support of HB 2002. HB 2002 strengthens the protections around and equitable access to sexual, reproductive, and gender affirming health care, recognizing this as part of high-quality lifespan medical care and for providing important resources to families.

It is a basic tenet of providing health care for children and adolescents that clinicians prioritize involving a safe and trusted adult when able, and encourage youth to disclose major health care needs to parents when they feel safe doing so. Family support is usually the best protective factor for the health and well-being of children and youth. When children and youth get the care and social-emotional support they need, they are better able to thrive.

HB 2002 does not change any previous Oregon laws or statutes related to the age of consent for reproductive health care. The purpose behind our existing medical consent laws is extensive: unfortunately, many minors do not disclose to their parents because they are afraid of physical or emotional abuse. A third of the minors who do not inform their parents they intend to have an abortion have *already* experienced family violence. Extensive literature shows that adolescents DO involve trusted adults in their care, and that forced disclosure does not improve their relationships, nor does it result in better or safer care.

In 2018, an AAP statement detailed that access to gender affirming care reduces mental health concerns for transgender and gender-diverse youth who, when denied appropriate health care and societal support (bullying and harassment), have significantly higher risks for substance abuse and suicide. In June 2022, the AAP reaffirmed its support for adolescents to receive “comprehensive, evidence-based reproductive healthcare services, including abortion.”

Developmentally appropriate sexual health care and the care of gender-diverse youth are closely monitored areas of medicine in which trained clinicians work with youth and, whenever possible, their families to provide careful, thoughtful individualized care that is



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rooted in best practices. Gender affirming care is a spectrum of care, and the primary goal is to support the mental health of youth so that they feel less isolated.

We know from history and experience that when a medical intervention is not explicitly allowed or monitored, people will still seek out options and alternatives, such as receiving procedures from unqualified and unvetted clinicians, or finding medications in unsavory and unmonitored places. When we have treatments that are monitored and protected by licensing agencies, we can protect our patients from unnecessary harm or misinformation. For instance, we have seen in the past that when access to reproductive health care is restricted, this primarily impacts people of color and those in rural and medically underserved areas, increasing their risk of seeking unsafe care. By enhancing access to reproductive health care, including gender affirming care, we are protecting the right to access vetted, qualified and tracked clinicians. Access to reproductive health care and gender affirming care is life-saving.

As pediatricians and child health providers, it is our job to ensure that all my patients receive excellent medical care from my team, and from the specialists who care for my patients. We ask our patients carefully about what other treatments and medications they are receiving. To provide medically necessary health care, health care providers and patients need to be protected from prosecution for offering reproductive and gender affirming care for anyone seeking those services in Oregon. Pediatricians are treating children and adolescents—and supporting their families—who are moving to Oregon or coming here from out of state because they feel persecuted and criminalized by their home-state laws. OPS is proud that Oregon is a leader in LGBTQ+ rights and can be a beacon of hope and tolerance for many marginalized families.

Equitable access to safe and legal options for full spectrum and developmentally appropriate health care, including access to contraception, abortion, and gender affirming care, is crucial for people of all ages, and a fundamental human right. We urge you to vote yes on HB 2002.

References

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<https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2022/aap-supports-adolescents-right-to-comprehensive-confidential-reproductive-health-care/>