April 28, 2023

TO: House Committee on Revenue
FROM: Our Children Oregon, The Children's Agenda
RE: Support for HB 2757, Building Out Oregon's 988 Crisis System

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice Chair Reschke, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon (OCO) is a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. The Children's Agenda, convened by OCO, brings together ~130 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the well-being of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our collective created a 2023 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families.

Children and youth in the United States are in the midst of a mental health crisis. Young people in Oregon and nationwide are struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. Data from 2016 and 2020 indicate children across the nation and in most states were more likely to deal with anxiety or depression during the first year of the pandemic (2020) than previously. In Oregon, 11.5% of children between the ages of 3 to 17 reported to have anxiety or depression in 2016, then in 2020 that jumped to 16.1%. That's an increase of 40% over 4 years.

In 2020, suicide was one of the top ten leading causes of death in Oregon according to the Center for Disease Control. Suicide rates are also higher among historically and systemically underserved communities, such as Alaskan Native and Native American youth and those belonging in the LGBTQIA+ community. According to the Annie E Casey Foundation's 2022 Kids Count Data Book, across the United States in 2019, 25% of Alaskan Native and Native American high school students attempted suicide, 12% were Black students, and 13% were two or more races.[1] In Oregon specifically, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for Alaskan Native and Native Americans between the ages of 10 to 24.[2]

Nationally in 2019, 23% of students belonging to the LGBTQIA2S+ community made attempts on their lives, compared to 6% students who identified as heterosexual.[3] The Oregon Health

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[1] https://www.aecf.org/resources/2022-kids-count-data-book
[2] https://www.oregonsuicideprevention.org/community/native-american/
[3] https://www.aecf.org/resources/2022-kids-count-data-book

Authority reported in the 2017 Healthy Teens Survey that 50% of LGBTQIA2S+ 8th graders contemplated suicide, nearly 25% attempted suicide, and 33% of transgender 8th graders attempted suicide.[4]

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline needs to be fully implemented and funded in order to ensure a sufficiently trained and compensated workforce can be readily available when a crisis occurs. In 2021, the Oregon Legislature partially enacted 988 implementation legislation, creating two 988 call centers based in Oregon and expanding mobile response teams across the state. However, several key elements were deferred until 2023 to ensure time for thoughtful planning. The 2023 Children's Agenda supports HB 2757 to fulfill those key elements. HB 2757 will create the 988 Trust Fund to ensure seamless financing for 9-8-8 call centers, mobile crisis units, and related crisis services. HB 2757 will also create a true multi-stakeholder advisory body to ensure smooth implementation of 988 across Oregon. HB 2757 is essential to ensure a strong, equitable, and consistent 988 system across the state, serving *all* Oregonians regardless of race, age, or zip code.

We thank you for your time and efforts to improve access to mental health services for all Oregonians. We urge you to support HB 2757 to ensure that everyone, especially our children and youth, has mental health services readily available to them when in a crisis.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Delina Biniam, Policy and Legislative Fellow

Ivy Major-McDowall, Policy and Advocacy Director

Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

View the 2023 Children's Agenda at www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda

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[4] https://www.oregonsuicideprevention.org/community/lgbtq/