

Submitter: Gina Huntington

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2729

My name is Gina Huntington, and I am parent of 2 children as well as an employee of a local youth nonprofit.

I'm writing in support of HB 2729, which provides critical resources that youth and families across Oregon need now. Oregon is ranked 49th in the nation for youth mental health, and it's showing in our schools through rampant behavior issues and high rates of chronic absenteeism. HB 2729 provides evidence-based resources that will be quickly available for schools to support youth mental and physical health. A study conducted in Oregon found that youth are 10-21x more likely to seek mental health support at a school-based health center (SBHC) and that SBHCs that increased mental health capacity were 12% less likely to report a depressive episode; 16% less likely to report suicidal ideation; and 18% less likely to report a suicide attempt.

I support this bill because it is critical that we provide the support and resources our students need to grow into healthy and successful adults. So many students are being left untreated with nowhere to go. This leads to more bullying, depression, anxiety and unstable human beings who make harmful choices - like taking the lives of themselves or others. As we all know, our students have still not recovered emotionally from COVID. My own child suffers from anxiety that has only gotten worse since COVID. We are one of the lucky ones who have been able to find care outside of the school system, but most have or cannot. The demand way out numbers the availability. Our schools, in their current condition, cannot provide this help either as they are struggling as is. And we should not expect our teachers and untrained staff to be the solution. Even something as simple as following a 504 plan/IEP is not happening since many of our schools don't have the capacity to follow through which we know is harmful to both the students with the specialized plans and those around them. Something needs to change now as we are failing our students.

Our youth need this now and these resources will allow for an immediate increase in our capacity to support them. I urge you to vote yes on HB 2729."

Thank you,  
Gina Huntington