

Submitter: Elisabeth Hartner
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2729
Chair Neron and Members of the Committee:

My name is Elisabeth Hartner and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Public Health Association.

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.

The Oregon Public Health Association support this bill because we believe school health centers are critical as they provide accessible, comprehensive care that supports the health of young people in our community. These centers reduce barriers to healthcare, offering immediate medical and mental health services, and addressing chronic conditions, which helps improve attendance and academic performance. They also provide preventive care, health education, and support for both students and faculty, contributing to a positive, productive school culture. By promoting equitable access to healthcare, school health centers reduce health disparities, ensuring all students, especially those from underserved backgrounds, can succeed both academically and personally.

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

Thank you,

Elisabeth Hartner, MPH
Executive Director
Oregon Public Health Association