

MEMORANDUM

To: Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the House Committee on Education

From: Marty Carty, Governmental Affairs Director, Oregon Primary Care Association

Date: February 5, 2025

Re: Oppose HB 2577

Community health centers (CHC) are the cornerstone of primary care across our state and a core part of their mission is accepting all patients regardless of insurance, where they were born, or ability to pay. The CHC model of integrated care has led to [24% lower costs](#) to the system for Medicaid patients as compared to other primary care settings. School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) are an extension of that efficient health care model and serve as a point-of-access for students and their families who might otherwise not have consistent access to health care in rural, urban, and frontier communities. The result – better health, better care, and lower costs.

Over [70% of SBHCs across the state are operated by CHCs](#) in partnership with local school and education service districts. These community-based clinics are located either within a school, on school grounds, or as a mobile medical van. These unique partnerships connect children and families to the high-quality health care they need to thrive. Embedded in their communities, SBHCs provide culturally responsive, essential health care services while reducing barriers such as transportation, which often keeps children and their families from seeking the health services they need. SBHCs are community centered, culturally responsive solutions that can reduce cost and health deserts while building trust with patients who face economic, neighborhood, racial, language, and cultural barriers to care.

HB 2577 as written would severely disrupt Oregon's SBHC program. It would disrupt the school-based telehealth pilot which the Oregon Health Authority is currently evaluating and cause significant care coordination issues for Oregon youth. Furthermore, it would make Oregon's community health centers ineligible to participate in the pilot program created by HB 2577 because they don't serve 50,000 students. Furthermore, a telehealth only model of care leaves kids without a provider to turn to when they need in-person services.

OPCA believes that investing in Oregon health care providers who are already providing comprehensive health care services to Oregon's kids is the best way to expand services to Oregon's youth.

OPCA recognizes the urgent mental health crisis that is impacting Oregon's youth and SBHCs are

perfectly positioned to address this growing need. Oregon's CHCs are expanding their capacity to provide trauma-informed care in the areas of mental and behavioral health care – for most, a behavioral health screening is a standard part of care. Others are increasing staff capacity for Substance Use Disorder prevention. When SBHCs are able to provide [on-site mental health care](#), they can reduce incidences of depression, suicide, and substance use. When they cannot provide on-site services, they are meeting the needs of Oregon kids through telehealth services which ensures care coordination across the patient's health care journey and means they can access in-person services when appropriate.

[Providing trauma-informed mental health counseling](#) reduces disparities in mental health care utilization among students and families who have been historically marginalized, including children of color, those who are LGBTQIA2S+, people who live in rural areas, and who have disabilities. SBHCs have the potential to mitigate the risks of [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#) by supporting positive relationship-building with adults and diminishing impacts of chronic stress and trauma – this reduces risk for chronic disease over the course of life and extends children's life expectancy. Having access to trauma-informed mental health services at SBHCs can literally save lives, immediately and in the future.

Sincerely,

Marty Carty
Governmental Affairs Director

The Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA) is the nonprofit membership organization for the state's 34 federally qualified health centers (FQHCs). OPCA member clinics deliver comprehensive, culturally responsive integrated medical, dental, and behavioral health services for traditionally underserved communities. As a unifying voice of Oregon's FQHCs, OPCA drives transformative policy development to advance health equity across the state and beyond.

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