



To: The House Committee on Education

From: Oregon Heals Coalition

Date: February 5, 2025

Re: In Support of House Bill 2729

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Dobson, Vice-Chair McIntire, and members of the committee,

The Oregon Heals Coalition is a statewide policy and advocacy coalition led by **APANO**, **PCUN** and **Family Forward Oregon**.

We formed this statewide mental health policy and advocacy coalition in 2021, following the beginning of a health-related pandemic that included a mental health crisis felt disproportionately by youth, caregivers, and communities of color.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, Oregon's behavioral health needs have intensified, revealing a longstanding issue that predates the pandemic. In fact, in many areas, Oregon's behavioral health challenges surpass the national average.

Our current mental health system is not meeting the needs of our communities, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), who face the greatest barriers to access and often encounter stigma when seeking care.



The Oregon Heals Coalition envisions a mental health system that is equitable, affordable, culturally responsive, and, most importantly, community-centered. We aim to create a system that fully serves those who have historically been denied access to care.

In developing our 2025 Legislative Agenda, the Oregon Heals Coalition worked closely with community partners. We enlisted a group of mental health champions, each with lived experience in the mental health field, to help us prioritize the initiatives that would have the greatest impact. One such priority is HB 2729, which in addition to many other things, would increase the school-based mental health fund to provide additional mental health and substance use services in schools.

School-based health centers (SBHC's) are proven to increase access to critical health services, for children, families, and communities, which results in both short-term and long-term benefits¹. SBHC's are particularly vital to low-income, BIPOC, and undocumented immigrant communities, who face unique and difficult challenges while seeking health and mental health care².

Not only do SBHC's have a positive impact on absences, dropout rates, disciplinary outcomes, and health-related outcomes, they also increase primary mental health-care use and decrease the need for overall hospitalizations and ER visits³. For all these reasons and many more, SBHC's are an effective tool in realizing health equity⁴.

¹ [The Evidence of School-Based Health Centers: A Review](#)

² [School-based Health Centers to Advance Health Equity](#)

³ [Impact of School-Based Health Centers on Students with Mental Health Problems](#)

⁴ [School-based Health Centers to Advance Health Equity](#)



oregon heals
COALITION

By passing HB 2729, and expanding access to mental health and substance use services in schools, Oregon would be making an investment in Oregon's future - one that will lead to healthier children, families, and communities.

Please join us in supporting legislation that positively impacts Black, Indigenous, and other Oregonians of color. **Oregon Heals strongly urges your "YES" vote on HB 2729.**

Sincerely,

The Oregon Heals Coalition

