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Testimony in Support of Increased Access to Mental Health Services for Oregon Students

To Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson, McIntire and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Travis Gayles, and I am here today as a physician and Chief Health Officer for Hazel Health, the nation's largest and most trusted provider of school-centered telehealth services. I am pleased to offer this written testimony **in support of HB 2577**, on behalf of Hazel Health and to advocate for the critical need to expand access to mental health services for Oregon students. **HB 2557** allows for the OHA to contract with a qualifying telehealth provider to run a pilot project in school districts that select to participate.

At Hazel Health, we work to bridge the gap between schools, families, and healthcare providers. By bringing healthcare into the school environment, we ensure that all students—regardless of their insurance status or socioeconomic background—have access to the services they need to stay healthy and thrive academically. As a medical professional, I have seen firsthand the profound impact that accessible, high-quality healthcare can have on a child's development and educational success.

The Most Accessible Care for All Students

One of the cornerstones of our model is providing telehealth services at no out-of-pocket cost to families. This makes healthcare accessible to all students, regardless of their insurance coverage. The results speak for themselves:

- Over 410,000 hours of learning have been recovered as students are able to return to class after a physical health visit.
- Absenteeism has decreased significantly, and students are more engaged in their education.
- Our diverse network of providers, who speak over 21 languages, helps ensure that students and families from all backgrounds have the care and support they need.

By offering healthcare in the places where students spend the most time—at school and at home—Hazel Health ensures that students remain in class, engaged, and ready to learn. This holistic approach has the potential to improve not just short-term academic outcomes, but long-term health and well-being.

School-Centered Mental Health: Intervening When It Matters Most

As a physician, I am particularly concerned by the state of mental health care for children. Nearly one in five children experiences mental health challenges, yet the vast majority of them—about 80%—go untreated. This gap in care can have a profound effect on a child's ability to succeed academically and socially.

Through Hazel Health's teletherapy program, we offer students in participating school districts barrier-free access to mental health services. Our teletherapy model has been shown in third-party studies to yield clinically significant outcomes for students struggling with mental health challenges. By intervening early—when the brain is still developing—we can make a lasting impact on a child's trajectory, helping them succeed in school and beyond.

Providing early intervention is not just good for students' health, it is good for their futures. By addressing mental health needs at the critical developmental stages, we set students up for success in their education, post-secondary pursuits, careers, and ultimately, their lives.

The Case for Expanding School-Centered Telehealth Services

The data we've collected supports the effectiveness of this model. Hazel Health has proven that when students have access to healthcare, they are more likely to remain in school, be engaged, and perform better academically. The impact is clear:

- 92% of students report positive outcomes after utilizing our telehealth services.
- Over 5,130 schools, reaching more than 5.1 million students nationwide, have partnered with Hazel Health.
- Hazel Health's teletherapy services have led to a 60% reduction in absenteeism and a 50% decrease in disciplinary actions.

As a physician, I believe that expanding access to telehealth services in schools is not just a matter of convenience—it is a matter of public health. By ensuring that every child has access to the care they need, we can improve not only their educational outcomes, but their long-term health and well-being.

Conclusion

The model that Hazel Health has developed is a proven, sustainable solution that makes healthcare more accessible and impactful for students. By providing high-quality, school-centered care, we can change the trajectory of children's lives for the better.

I urge you to support efforts to expand access to school-centered telehealth services across Oregon. Together, we can ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to succeed and lead a healthy, fulfilling life.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.