

Submitter: Laura Erceg
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB529

Dear Senator Deb Patterson and members of the Senate Committee on Healthcare,

I am writing today in support of SB 529. I live and work in a rural setting along the coast and have seen the positive impact that Traditional Health Care Workers (THWs) have in our spaces. Most of my experience with THWs comes from those who pursue a Youth Support Specialist (YSS) designation. I have seen the impact this training has on both the trainee who is now, as a young adult, able to give back to their community through supporting other youth with similar life challenges, as well as the youth recipients of the service. Six months ago, a youth I have known for seven years completed their training to become a YSS. We offered to be a host site for his work experience and he has created significant improvements in our youth engagement through his leadership and peer support services. A lot of the youth we work with are hesitant to seek out or receive support from traditional spaces due to experiences of homophobia, racism, and agism. Having a Youth Peer Support help them navigate systems such as medical doctors, finding therapists, and identifying goals has been huge. Youth are getting jobs in fields they desire, moving out of their homes (we work with a number of 20-something youth), and going back to school. This is because of the support work that this position offers and the connection to someone with shared lived experiences. I wish we could keep him forever, but the restrictions around supervision and billing make it impossible for our small, fiscally sponsored organization to take that on.

I am proud to say that last week he was hired by Youth ERA to be a part-time peer support for our broader youth community. I know he will excel. This job has been his dream for years. I also know that our organization and our broader community would benefit from more access to these positions being centered in community based organizations.

I hope you'll support SB 529. For rural community members, it has the potential to transform how we do care.