

## **Written Testimony of Todd Nicholson, Principal, Rivercrest Academy, in Support of HB 2502 3/12/2025**

### **Introduction:**

Thank you, Chairs Prozanski, Kropf, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide both oral and written testimony in support of HB 2502. As I stated in my oral testimony, my name is Todd Nicholson, and I am a school psychologist and principal administrator of Rivercrest Academy, a recovery school serving the Portland metropolitan area. I'm also honored to be a member of the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission's Recovery Subcommittee. My oral testimony focused on the critical importance of Section 3. In this written testimony, I extend my support to include Sections 1 and 2, offering my perspective as both a recovery school principal and a member of the recovery subcommittee of the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission.

### **Support for Section 3 (as presented in oral testimony):**

#### **Oral Testimony of Todd Nicholson , Principal, Rivercrest Academy, in Support of HB 2502, Section 3. Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response.**

I am here today to testify in strong support of HB 2502 and to highlight the importance of Section 3 of HB 2502.

This evening, I am advocating for the Oregon Health Authority, in partnership with the Department of Education and the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission, to provide financial grants to approved recovery schools. This funding is crucial in offsetting the unique costs associated with offering a recovery school model such as the drug and alcohol screening costs, as well as building capacity for billing and reimbursement of health services, supporting non-billable treatment and recovery services, and establishing alternative peer group models.

As you know, the previous legislative session saw overwhelming bipartisan support for HB 2767, which aimed to provide equitable access to recovery schools for youth across Oregon, including in rural Oregon. Unfortunately the recent proposed reduction in funding for recovery schools poses a significant threat to the vision and more concerning, access for youth outside the Portland metro area. This proposed funding reduction not only jeopardizes the expansion of current recovery schools but effectively halts the development of new ones. The requested funding support from the OHA is only to offset some costs. If the current 6.3 million budget stands, there will barely be enough to sustain the three approved schools, which means that youth outside the Willamette Valley will not have access to recovery schools for the next biennium.

Transferring or utilizing funds from the Oregon Health Authority to support recovery schools is a logical and necessary step.

At Rivercrest, we are committed to providing a robust standards based education, but Rivercrest is more than just a school, it is a vital part of the equation to support families and youth in achieving and maintaining long term sobriety. Our comprehensive, holistic approach addresses both the academic and recovery needs of our students.

Since receiving state funding, Rivercrest Academy has doubled in size, demonstrating the critical need for our services. However, due to the impending budget cuts under the \$6.3 million model, I am now faced with the difficult prospect of restricting access. This is a devastating reality, considering the well-documented shortage of adolescent substance use disorder services in Oregon.

Recovery schools are a proven solution, offering a unique and effective environment for students to thrive academically and in their recovery. By supporting HB 2502, you will ensure that these vital programs can continue to serve our most vulnerable youth.

### **Support for Section 1:**

*SECTION 1. (1) The Oregon Health Authority shall: (a) Develop a statewide plan for the delivery of recovery services to children and young adults, including but not limited to those enrolled in recovery schools; and (b) Submit the plan developed under paragraph (a) of this subsection to the Joint Interim Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response, or any successor committee, by no later than September 15, 2024.*

As a member of the recovery subcommittee of the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission, I recognize the critical need for a comprehensive, statewide plan for recovery services for children and young adults. Section 1 of HB 2502 is vital. A coordinated and strategic approach is essential to ensure that our youth have access to the full spectrum of recovery support they need. This plan will provide a roadmap for effective service delivery, addressing gaps and improving outcomes. Particularly, including recovery schools in this plan is crucial as we are a unique and effective resource for youth in recovery.

### **Support for Section 2:**

*SECTION 2. The Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission, in collaboration with the System of Care Advisory Council established in ORS 418.978, shall develop a comprehensive plan for a youth continuum of care to prevent, treat and provide recovery services for substance use disorders. The plan shall include recommended statutory, regulatory and funding changes for state agencies that serve youth.*

Section 2 of HB 2502 is crucial because it mandates the creation of a comprehensive youth continuum of care plan, led by the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission in partnership with the System of Care Advisory Council. This plan is essential for addressing the complex needs of young people struggling with substance use disorders. By outlining a clear pathway for prevention, treatment, and recovery services, it will ensure that youth receive timely and appropriate support at every stage.

Furthermore, the inclusion of recommended statutory, regulatory, and funding changes across state agencies will facilitate a coordinated and effective response, ultimately improving outcomes for Oregon's youth.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, I strongly urge the committee to support HB 2502 in its entirety. All sections, including the funding of OHSU to assist with system coordination and education across agencies are all essential to ensuring that Oregon's youth have access to the recovery services they need to thrive. Your support of this bill will make a significant impact on the lives of countless young people and their families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Todd Nicholson*

Todd Nicholson

Principal, Rivercrest Academy

Member, Recovery Subcommittee of the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission