

Submitter: Karen Gragg

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety
Response

Measure, Appointment or
Topic: HB2502

March 12, 2025

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB 2502, HB 3321, HB 3375

Dear Co-Chairs Prozanski and Kropf, Members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response:

I realize I'm submitting this on the evening you all are meeting, but I felt it was important to share my experience and express my strong support for HB 2502, HB 3321, and HB 3375.

As a parent of a high school student who struggled with mental health issues and drug use, I have seen firsthand the urgent need for stronger primary prevention programs and expanded services for Oregon's youth.

My daughter was in middle school during the pandemic. The prolonged isolation during the pandemic led her into a deep depression. During her freshman year, she struggled in a traditional high school environment. She was regularly skipping class and started using hard drugs. We partnered with our daughter's pediatrician, psychiatrist, social workers, and her high school, and hit wall after wall when it came to finding her help. We, like many parents, were told to send our daughter to the emergency room when her anger and violence escalated in hopes that they may be able to provide help. We were quickly moved through the system with no hope of getting the help we needed. Realizing how few resources there are in Oregon to support teens who are struggling with combined mental health and drug use, we made the very difficult decision to send our daughter out of state for residential support. We faced the very real possibility of losing her to an overdose and we knew we had to do something.

We recognize how fortunate we are to have resources to support my daughter on her path to recovery. We know many families struggle with finding resources and it is heartbreaking to see so many kids go without support. While our daughter was away, she lost a very close friend from middle school to an overdose. It is a loss she carries with her every day.

As we planned to bring our daughter home from residential treatment during her sophomore year, we were fortunate to be able to enroll her in Rivercrest Academy.

We can't imagine how hard her transition home would have been without Rivercrest. The school provides the much-needed balance of mental health resources and recovery support, along with the academic support she needs to stay on track toward graduation next year. The small and supportive setting has allowed her to continue to build her skills to successfully navigate her daily life. We feel so lucky to have Rivercrest as a resource. It is a critical part of her ongoing journey of recovery. We want Rivercrest and other recovery schools, as well as expanded intervention and recovery resources, to be available to more kids in need.

- I appreciate the Legislature's efforts to develop and implement a primary prevention state strategy (HB 3321).
- Ensure a clear and comprehensive assessment of youth substance use prevention, screening, intervention, and treatment and support invaluable recovery high schools (HB 3375, HB 2502).
- Strengthen the role of the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission, requiring distinct and regular youth-focused and primary prevention reporting on plans and outcomes (HB 2502, HB 3321, HB 3375, and ultimately HB 2929).

If these bills merge, I respectfully request that the definition of primary prevention remain strong and that a clear, strategic approach to primary prevention not be weakened. Additionally, I urge the Committee to consider ensuring explicit youth and primary prevention reporting requirements as a distinct pillar within HB 2929.

Thank you for your leadership on these critical issues. By supporting these bills, you will safeguard Oregon's youth, strengthen families, and promote healthier communities across our state. I appreciate your consideration and respectfully request your "Do Pass" and "Yes" vote on these measures.

Sincerely,
Karen G.