

Dear Members of the Oregon Legislative Assembly

I am writing to express my support for House Bill 3004 as a program director working in this space. I am the youth program director of Community Mediation Services (CMS), a dispute resolution center serving both Clark County WA, and Multnomah County, OR.

At present, CMS provides the services envisioned in HB3004 in Clark County, WA. We have partnered with 8 schools this school year, directly training over 160 middle and high school students in conflict resolution techniques, indirectly impacting the school environment of around 6800 students in the Vancouver Public Schools and Evergreen Public Schools. Our program has a profoundly positive impact on our trained students' sense of empowerment, as they both navigate conflict in their own lives more confidently, but also make an impact on the conflicts of their fellow students. Programs such as these assist school staff by intervening in conflicts before they escalate into situations involving more punitive disciplinary approaches.

Peer Mediation works best when we can recruit conflict adjacent youth, students whose friends, or possibly themselves, may be regularly in contact with traditional schools' discipline, and provides them with tools to gain the best outcome from any given conflict, and an orientation of respect toward others' perspectives. Our program has anchored students into the school community, and allowed them to use their special "x-factor" quality of leadership which was present, but not always given a positive outlet.

We are actively seeking a framework and resources to implement this tried and true program in Multnomah County. At present, all our funding for this specific type of youth work is Washington state specific, but we stand ready to implement this in Multnomah once we gain that capacity.

There are many different directions a program like this can take to support the specific needs of the partner school and community. We have had some schools lean into the workplace applications of mediation skills, through creating a professionalization and internship pathway for students. We have leaned into the restorative practices aspect of peer mediation, to address community building and connection in a partner school. One can also leverage youth support to counselling staff to emphasize the ways a program like this can improve school safety. The core tenet of conflict resolution remains the same, this programming is ultimately flexible in its implementation to provide what partner schools need most.

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