

March 24, 2025

Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the committee:

My name is Neha Hertzog, and I am the School Safety and Prevention Specialist for Northwest Regional Education Service District, serving Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, and Washington Counties. I would like to express my support for House Bill 3562, as amended to include fully funding the Statewide School Safety and Prevention System at its current service level.

Without a statewide program, school safety and prevention efforts are inconsistent and inequitable, varying dramatically from district to district. A statewide program ensures that every student and educator – whether in a large urban district or a small rural school – has access to the same level of protection and resources.

In my role, I train school staff and community partners in prevention strategies, system development, and managing lower-level mental health and safety situations onsite. Even at our current service level, there is a greater demand for training than I am able to provide because of capacity. I also facilitate teams to address higher level concerns, and I provide consultation on all kinds of cases involving complex safety concerns. I have consulted on around 100 cases so far this school year, and it's only March.

Too often, school safety efforts focus on reaction – responding after a tragedy occurs or when a situation has escalated to imminent danger. But the best way to prevent violence is to foster an environment where students feel connected and supported. We do this by addressing root causes: isolation, trauma, lagging skills, and mental health struggles. This proactive work leads to students attending school because they want to be there, teachers seeing fewer behaviors in the classroom, and students who have the skills to regulate themselves and resolve conflict.

When something does go wrong, we need school staff trained with skills and knowledge to notice before it reaches the point of crisis, and to intervene early with evidence-based strategies. All previous acts of school violence were precipitated by warning signs, often for years; we need people to notice them and do something.

Finally, if there is an emergency, we want a swift, coordinated response. We want schools, first responders, and other community agencies all having identified clear communication channels in advance, using the same protocols, and having shared language. This reduces confusion and errors and can save lives.



# Northwest Regional Education Service District

The statewide School Safety and Prevention System is essential for building safer learning environments, fostering well-being and belonging, and saving lives. Without the funding proposed in this amendment, we are facing a nearly 50% reduction in staffing and service. I urge you to pass HB 3562 with the proposed amendment to fund this program at *at least* our current service level and not make students and staff vulnerable to preventable harm.

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