

Chair Blouin and members of the committee,

My name is Jesus Nunez-Pineda, I have been a governor appointed member of the Systems of Care committee since its inception as well as a co-creator of its youth council that I currently co-chair. I am a trans Mexican immigrant with personal lived experience as a youth accessing services in Oregon particularly in the mental health and homelessness systems. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB-1197.

Throughout my time as a youth advocate I have had the privilege of having a voice at multiple tables with the purpose of improving quality of life for the youth of Oregon. Though the difficulties that plague our youth are vast and the diversity of such issues can make the work feel as though it has no right answers, there has been one common thread that has persisted both overtly and in the subtext of all greater conversations being held - that being "upstream intervention". For so long we have remained reactionary in our approach to mental health, always finding ourselves doing damage control while asking ourselves "how could we have prevented this" while our youth and family pay the price. At the end of the day, how strong can one be when they are exhausted.

Respite is a topic often not discussed, in our ever-moving, ever evolving culture, stopping for a breath has become an afterthought. Let alone stopping to find access to a place to breathe, respite is just that. A breather, a break, a way to gather yourself for what might be coming up.

This bill aims at increasing access to respite services, bringing the breathing room that has been so illusive to many families and young people navigating the hardships of day to day life. This is a huge step in the work of upstream intervention. Why must we wait until the damage is done before we lend a hand, I fully support SB-1197. I believe the youth and families being given an avenue to take a break, and connect with supports would make a monumental impact in their mental health and overall wellbeing, I know it would have for me.