

Thriving Youth: Prevention & Intervention Initiative

Testimony of BB 360

Support HB 3631

Chair Prozanski, Chair Kropf, Members of the committee

My name is Geoff Sugerman speaking on behalf of Oregon Alliance of Camps. I am co-president of BB 360, a community based organization that offers overnight and day camp at our Lincoln City location, as well as 2 day camps in Portland and 1 in Vancouver Washington. We also offer a number of other programs and services, many of them based at our 100% ADA accessible camp on Devil's Lake in Lincoln County. We are happy to have an opportunity to speak in support of **House Bill 3631**, the **Thriving Youth: Prevention & Intervention Initiative**.

Overnight and Day camps are an often forgotten part of the key mix of community based organizations serving our children and families. At camps like ours, we are integral parts of our local community, providing everything from food for hungry school kids, flood and fire victims to free reading programs, in safe and secure camps where kids are learning to be better citizens everyday. We have a profound impact on the well-being of our youth and can be invaluable partners in delivering prevention and behavioral health support across Oregon. Yet we are often forgotten when it comes to summer learning programs.

A recent breakthrough study by the American Camp Association underscores the transformative effects of camp experiences. The National Camp Impact Study, conducted over five years, reports that high-quality camp experiences significantly enhance youth outcomes, particularly in areas such as independence, social awareness, and resilience.

This comprehensive study focused on three key areas: the growth of campers, the experiences of camp staff, and the role of leadership development programs. The findings are clear: camp helps youth build critical life skills such as independence, social awareness, emotional regulation, and leadership. These are foundational to mental health and resilience. The results affirm what many of us in youth development already know: camp is a powerful environment for prevention, personal growth, and long-term well-being.

This research reinforces the value of including camps as key partners in prevention and behavioral health support strategies. Camps offer safe, supportive, and enriching environments that help youth thrive—not just in the moment, but well into the future.

Notably, 58% of youth reported that camp helped them appreciate the importance of being present in the moment, fostering mindfulness and emotional regulation. Furthermore, 92% of campers felt good about themselves during their camp experience, and 96% made new friends. These statistics highlight camps as environments where youth build self-esteem, develop coping strategies, and form supportive relationships—key components in preventing mental health challenges. This pilot program would allow us to increase access to behavioral specialists who are guiding youth in this essential skill development.

Additionally, camps offer opportunities for young adults to develop leadership skills and gain confidence, with many reporting that their camp experiences were instrumental in their personal and professional growth.

In Oregon, where youth face increasing mental health challenges, integrating camps into our behavioral health strategy is not just beneficial—it is essential. Camps provide safe, structured environments where youth can engage in meaningful activities, build resilience, and receive support from trained

professionals. By partnering with camps, we can extend our reach and effectiveness in promoting mental well-being among young people.

This is our opportunity to join forces with afterschool and summer partners, using evidence-based curriculum through the unique experience that camps provide, to gauge our impact, build on our current successful programming, and shift the course of Oregon's youth.

Camps are more than recreational spaces; they are powerful platforms for youth development and mental health prevention. I urge you to include camps alongside our other community based youth development partners in our collective efforts to support Oregon's youth.

We urge you to vote yes on HB 3631.