

March 21, 2021

Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

RE: Support Senate Bill 782

Chair Dembrow and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Daniel Hadi. I'm a student at Mountainside High School in Beaverton, Oregon. I'm a member of Students for a Healthy Oregon and I'm here today to ask for your support for Senate Bill 782.

When we started meeting as a group last year, with Oregon high school students representing communities statewide, it was interesting to learn about our shared experiences related to lack of mental health support and resources in school. A problem we all agree will only get worse, as next year, many students will be returning to school after more than 18 months of online learning. Recent studies from ACLU of Southern California have shown that more than half of students said they are in need of mental health support. That includes 22% who said they were receiving some kind of support before the closures and an additional 32% who said their mental health needs have arisen since schools closed. The statistic is likely to be very similar for Oregon students.

Senate Bill 782 is important for proactively addressing these issues. The bill creates a voluntary pilot program establishing mental health wellness checkups in Oregon Schools. This mental health checkup is modeled after similar screenings the Oregon legislature has enacted such as tests for vision, or a physical test taken before participating in a sport. This pilot program will also provide community education and information that pertains to the program, training for educators and administrators to provide the screening, and help with determining a system for referral. In addition, the proposed reporting will help influence future, long-term solutions, consequently becoming an investment for the future.

I have always struggled with managing anxiety and stress. In Middle School I began to notice increased excessive worrying, trouble sleeping, and agitation. I did not know why this was occurring or how to solve these issues leading to the problem just getting worse and not seeking out the help I needed. If my school provided mental health wellness checkups, I would have identified the issue sooner, and be given the information and support needed to address the issue.

It is critical that we implement this bill now and begin addressing the mental health crisis impacting students, teachers, and families all across Oregon. Please consider passing Senate Bill 782 to help more students like me.

Thank you,
Daniel Hadi