

Chair Burdick, Vice-Chair George, and other members of the committee,

My name is Mark Van Hoomissen. I'm the principal of what is called the Portland Public Schools Portland Day and Residential Treatment School. We are a state-funded education program which serves children receiving day and residential treatment mental health services through our 6 private-agency partners at 9 separate locations. Day and residential treatment are two of the most intensive forms of treatment for youth. I partner with:

Boys and Girls Aid

Janus Youth Programs

Lifeworks Northwest

Morrison Child and Family Services

Trillium Family Services

Salvation Army

Who are the kids I serve?

Who are the kids I serve in conjunction with the above agencies? From every region of Oregon, kids who have been severely traumatized throughout life. For the next part of my testimony, I'm going to ask you to stay with me to get a sense of what some of the children have experienced. I imagine you'll be uncomfortable. Imagine what it's like for the kids.

If you would picture for a second a daughter, niece, grand-daughter. Imagine some of the worst things that could happen to them...and I encourage you to reach a little further for your worst-case scenario. Imagine a short life time full of these experiences.

Also, imagine an eight-year old boy living with a drug addicted mother. Drug addiction has masked any sense of love and care for her young boy. In order to get her next fix, all she has to offer is her young son...to brutal, careless dealers in a hyper-sexualized, methamphetamine impacted environment.

Imagine a teenager, who wants so badly to just be normal...normal teenage angst, normal mood swings, normal conflict, normal challenging of authority...and not hear voices, or see hallucinations that are only frightening, or cut their skin so they actually feel anything at all. Or to wake up in the fog and emptiness of chronic depression, if they slept at all, and not immediately figure out how they can attempt or commit suicide.

Additionally, the treatment providers I work with report kids come into the programs more aggressive now than in previous years and need constant, immediate support to process emotional problems. There's also an increased need to counsel and coach youth on basic hygiene and life skills most of us

take for granted. It has also been observed that the youth's ability to tap into some of the more effective treatment regimens has been negatively impacted because of so much environmental trauma.

And for survivors, male or female, imagine the drug and alcohol use which develops as they work to numb the pain.

These are the realities for many of the youth I work with across the Portland Metro area in private treatment facilities as the school provider. About half of our students are eligible for special education services.

What about the families?

Many of the families associated with the students face chronic barriers to sufficient resources, whether that is housing, food, employment. A majority of the children are under state guardianship through DHS or OYA. Many families aren't surprised to see tragedy on their doorstep because it's a frequent visitor.

Some of our families are more stable economically. You might ask, if this is so important, why aren't they here with me. Why aren't they here providing testimony? Because they too are in crisis. There may be relief for many that their son or daughter is still alive after a suicide attempt or dangerous, reckless behavior. Others are just coming to the realization of how mental illness seems to have robbed them of a child they once knew.

National Crisis

Aside from the social and emotional problems students with mental illness face, educational and career and outcomes are often just as challenging.

I would be happy to provide you with several research articles whose common theme is that adolescents with mental illness are far less likely to earn a high school diploma and experience the associated long-term economic impact of missing this important milestone. And the very real reality that a bad personal outcome initiates a cycle which will eventually impact the next generation of kids.

So how does this look from an educational perspective?

Youth are referred to treatment for mental health reasons and we are the school provider. Youth enter and leave the treatment agency for treatment purposes only. A child could enter treatment and our school program in October and exit treatment and our school program in March. We serve approximately 200 kids across the Portland Metro area at any one and approximately 550 over the course of the school year.

For students pre-tested in writing during the 2012-2013 school year, students average score was 2 with a 4 meeting benchmark and 6 being the highest. A 2 means "Main ideas and purpose are somewhat unclear or development is attempted but minimal (Ideas and Content) AND the writing lacks a clear

organizational structure. An occasional organizational device is discernible; however, the writing is either difficult to follow and the reader has to reread substantial portions, or the piece is simply too short to demonstrate organizational skills (Organization).

Students in our programs struggle with basic writing skills at entry. Our data shows an average score of 3 when post-tested.

Behavior data from 2012-2013 shows students a high incidence of problems behaviors demonstrated by students. Problem Behaviors include:

- Externalizing Problems, such as aggressive acts and poor temper control
- Internalizing Problems, such as sadness and anxiety
- Hyperactivity, such as fidgeting and impulsive acts

Assessment data from this year on a new computerized assessment shows that our high school students score in the middle school range for Vocabulary and Comprehension.

How do students react?

Overall, with the right amount of staff in place, students are willing to trying and achieve in school...even with the emotional and academic realities they face.

Overall, when we encourage them to work through the process in math or challenge them to be more clear in writing, or increase expectations for them behaviorally, with the right amount of staff in place, they often say yes, because they know more than anyone else how much their education matters. They're living the situation we're trying to help improve.

It shows in the writing improvement from last year. I expect we'll see it this year as well.

With all of the struggles and trauma the students face, their resiliency is always humbling to me. Last week, we asked a couple of students after school what school meant to them and what their goals are. It's amazing how similar they sound to any other student...because they want to have the life we want for them...safe, secure, productive. The students' responses:

STUDENT TESTIMONY 1/31/2014:

STUDENT 1 (17 year old female) attending residential facility:

1.) What are you future/life goals?

- *I hope to attend college, earn a diploma, and work in the medical field, maybe ultrasound/radiology.*
- *I'd like to help little kids, as a coach for volleyball or some sport*
- *I may decide to go to school and learn how to do hair. I'd like to open my own salon. I have aunts who do hair and we could all work together. It would be a family salon.*

2.) What does school mean to you?

- *Before I came to the residential facility/DART, I never went to school. I would skip weeks at a time. Now I'm a senior and am behind. I only have enough credits to be a 9th grader. Since being here, I attend school everyday and I get As and Bs. My favorite classes are English, Math, and Science. I also really like History. Especially because my teacher finds a way to make it interesting and I learn a lot.*

STUDENT 2 (14 year old female) attending residential facility:

1.) What are you future/life goals?

- *After I graduate from high school, I want to join the National Guard so I can help people, serve my country and get help with college. I don't know what I want to study in college, but I'd like to work and study in a field which is related to traveling.*

2.) What does school mean to you?

- *I haven't attended school regularly since the 3rd grade. My Mom moved around a lot and sometimes I wasn't even registered in my neighborhood school before she would move again. Since being at the residential facility/Portland DART School, I actually like school. I don't get bored like I did before and I feel like I'm being challenged. Especially when it comes to math. My favorite subjects are math, history, and art. It's amazing I like math because I didn't before I started school here. I like the way my teacher teaches history. He makes it interesting and fun.*

At the beginning of this testimony, I described the way adults hands have literally hurt these kids. I'm asking you to wrap your hands around these kids and say, "I got your back. We won't let you down. We'll get you what you need."

I can't say for certain what the financial impact of Senate Bill 1528 would mean to my program specifically. I do know that the programs are underfunded state-wide and the level of educational service students in the more than 40 treatment programs statewide is inadequate. My program endured a 25% budget reduction in 2011, along with the continued roll-up costs since then. The program lost a huge piece of its midsection which was critical to supporting students. It was devastating, with enough tears and anger from students and adults for more than one career. Roll-up costs increase each year, as do the needs of students.

I know there are always hard decisions to make when it comes to money. I'm going to ask you to think about the kids and families in crisis, the importance of a solid education in today's world, and need for enough caring, motivated, and skilled educators to work with our students. If you're willing to do that and get students in treatment what they need, there are 200 students in my program and several hundred across the state, whose lives are in your hands, who will be appreciative of your commitment and help.

Thank you again for your time.

Mark Van Hoomissen

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