



February 3, 2014

The Honorable Carolyn Tomei  
Chair, House Committee on Human Services and Housing  
900 Court St. NE, H-279  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Representative Tomei:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education and advocacy, writes in support of HB 4124, "Relating to youth suicide; declaring an emergency."

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10-24 in Oregon; more than one youth suicide death occurs per week in the state. Suicide accounts for more than three times the number of young people in Oregon lost to homicide; more than twice those lost to cancer; and more than the number three (cancer), four (homicide), and five (heart disease) leading causes of death combined.

While these statistics point to a serious public health problem, we do know that suicide is preventable. Ninety percent of people who die by suicide have a mental disorder at the time of their deaths; **one of the best ways to prevent suicide is by understanding and treating mental disorders.** HB 4124 would improve upon the current state strategic plan addressing youth suicide by including intervention with suicidal, depressed, and at-risk youth within the plan's scope and by requiring the identification of barriers to accessing intervention services. More often than not, it is discovered after the fact that a young person who died by suicide was suffering from an untreated, under-treated, or undiagnosed mental disorder. It is essential that the state focus on increasing access to treatment for youth currently struggling in addition to more upstream approaches that target youth more broadly before acute risk develops. HB 4124 would also improve upon the current strategic plan by requiring that the plan be updated at least once every five years. These updates are essential to ensure that the plan is up-to-date with current best practices, advances in suicide prevention research, and changes in available resources and data.

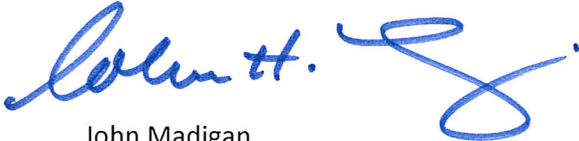
To design effective suicide prevention strategies, an essential first step is to ensure the availability of complete, accurate and timely information. Our effectiveness in preventing suicide ultimately depends on more fully understanding how and why suicide occurs. However, the current data on violent deaths collected by the CDC quoted in this letter, released in Fall 2012, are now over 4 years old. There is also no reliable national data set regarding suicide attempts and intentional self-injury – the CDC does gather data each year from hospitals on non-fatal injuries resulting from self-harm behavior (these current data

are 2 years old), but because of the way the data are collected, we are not able to distinguish intentional suicide attempts from non-intentional self-harm behaviors. The data are also reported in aggregate form nationally, and are not searchable by state. HB 4124 addresses this significant gap in data and knowledge at a state level by requiring detailed annual reports regarding Oregon's emergency room admissions for completed and attempted youth suicides and incidents of youth self-inflicted injury. These reports will significantly increase knowledge around how many young people in Oregon are completing and attempting suicide, the methods they are using, and whether they had previously received treatment related to depression, suicidal ideation, or self-injury. By linking these data, the state of Oregon will be able to reveal new insights and better target prevention activities.

We are most grateful to you for considering HB 4124. With your support, passage of this law will reaffirm the State of Oregon's commitment to improving the lives of Oregon youth at-risk and to preventing the tragic loss of young lives to suicide.

Please feel free to contact Nicole Gibson, AFSP Manager of State Advocacy and Grassroots Outreach, at [ngibson@afsp.org](mailto:ngibson@afsp.org) or (202) 449-3600 ext. 105 with any questions or if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,



John Madigan  
Vice President of Public Policy

Cc: AFSP Oregon