

From: Nancy Willard [<mailto:nwillard@peak.org>] On Behalf Of Nancy Willard  
Sent: Wednesday, February 05, 2014 10:17 AM  
To: Ross Cheyenne; Rep Tomei; Rep Gelser  
Subject: HB 4124

To: House Committee on Human Services and Housing  
From: Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D., Director, Embrace Civility in the Digital Age  
Re: HB 4124  
Date: February 5, 2014

I want to applaud Rep. Gelser on bringing attention to the concerns of youth suicide. However, it is my belief that the current plan of action set forth in HB 4124 will significantly undermine progress in addressing this concern. Specifically, the problems are associated with the proposed bureaucratic structure and the designation of responsibility for development of a Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan.

My background is in youth risk prevention, with a specific focus on bullying and digital safety. I wrote the first book ever published on cyberbullying, in 2007, and in this book I also addressed the concerns of digital postings that forecast the potential of suicide of violence.

I facilitated the introduction of the new safety director at MySpace and the National Lifeline, which resulted in the first social media presence of a suicide intervention program. I have served on two SAMHSA task forces, one which addressed online suicidal postings and the provision of online support to those in crisis and the other which focused on concerns of media reporting that bullying had caused youth suicide.

Because of this background, I recognize the need for a multi-tiered comprehensive effort to address any risk issue.

Rep. Gelser's efforts to call attention to the need for better crisis intervention support, greater involvement of mental health professionals, and the need to develop a Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan are to be applauded. All of these issues are exceptionally important to address. The problem is the means as currently included in HR 4124.

HR 4124 calls for the creation of a new position within Addictions and Mental Health Division and the designation of the responsibility of this staff person with the responsibility for the creation of this plan.

There already exists an excellent and active program for suicide prevention in Public Health Division of the Oregon Health Authority.

This program is engaged in extensive prevention and intervention efforts and has established a very excellent outreach program to professionals throughout the state and beyond.

It is true that many times two heads are better than one. But this is rarely the case when considering government bureaucratic structures. HR designates the responsibility for the data collection and development of a plan within a new department that lacks all of the appropriate connections with the professionals throughout the state who are focused on addressing the concern of youth suicide.

This legislation is essentially a slap in the face of highly qualified professionals who have been dedicated to the reduction of suicide within the Public Health Division. This legislation will also interfere with this Division's efforts to obtain additional funding for youth suicide prevention that will soon be available.

from the federal government through the Garrett Lee Smith Act. Given the generation of this federal legislation, Oregon is well-positioned to receive significant funds, an opportunity that will be lost if HB 4124 passes. The Garrett Lee Smith Act specifically requires a focus on prevention, not tertiary intervention.

Further, risk prevention must be considered 95% prevention and 5% crisis intervention. To place those generally responsible for crisis intervention in charge of the creation of a new plan to address youth suicide is truly the “tail wagging the dog.”

The specific data collection and plan action items contained in Section 2 of HB 4124 are excellent. To better address the concerns quite appropriately raised by Rep. Gelsler, I would recommend that these activities be the designated responsibilities of the Public Health division, with funding to support these expanded efforts.

Nancy

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