



Comments on Senate Bill 1558

From Chris Bouneff, Executive Director, NAMI Oregon

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Senate Committee On Education

NAMI Oregon wishes to express its support for Senate Bill 1558, which would protect the medical and mental health records of students who seek health care services at university health and counseling centers.

Onset of most mental illnesses occurs before individuals reach 24 years of age. Among college students, effective identification, intervention, and treatment is vital if Oregon is to successfully combat our health care system's traditionally poor performance in terms of delivering mental health care services.

For many students, who are away from their homes and regular health care settings, university health and counseling centers are the only viable place to seek assistance when a mental health care concern arises. These centers must perform effectively. Otherwise, students' mental health symptoms will worsen, becoming more disruptive to their lives and harder to treat.

But for university centers to be effective, students must feel comfortable accessing mental health care. Without privacy protections — protections they are afforded in any other health care setting — students either won't seek care or won't have the open and honest dialogue with their provider that is necessary to deliver quality treatment.

NAMI Oregon supports SB 1558 because the legislation clearly protects student privacy, increasing the likelihood that students will seek and benefit from help, and we urge the Committee's support.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input.