

To: Oregon House Committee on Education

From: Erin Fairchild, MSW, Defending Childhood Initiative Program Coordinator, and
Kate Gigler, Defending Childhood Initiative Trauma Informed Schools Specialist

Date: February 3, 2016

Re: Support for Oregon House Bill 4031

Multnomah County's Defending Childhood Initiative works across systems to help youth serving professionals better recognize and respond to childhood exposure to violence and trauma. National data show that 60% of children have been exposed to at least one form of violence in the past year, only illuminating a fraction of the types of trauma that students can experience. Research indicates that outside of primary caregiving relationships, school is the most powerful resiliency builder for students impacted by trauma. Unfortunately, many students with trauma symptoms are excluded from school environments for demonstrating the very behaviors we expect to see from trauma survivors, with students of color disproportionately excluded. And when trauma impacted students remain in school, their educational outcomes are often negatively impacted. *All kids* need access to quality educational environments where educators know how to meet their needs for safety, stability, and learning.

Defending Childhood partners with local school districts to provide professional development on exposure to violence, trauma and its impact on the developing brain, while creating customized plans for how 'trauma informed practices' can be implemented for a broad range of K-12 educational settings. Teachers, counselors and all school staff benefit greatly from drawing the connections between educational equity, behavior support, and guidance on the impact of trauma. This contextualized perspective, paired with concrete classroom level strategies, leaves teachers with a greater well of patience and empathy for struggling students. These teachers and counselors have shared:

"In working with kids who are struggling academically, trauma has to be part of the question."

"This training is so relevant to our work as counselors in schools."

"These trainings have been some of the most useful the school district has offered."

"In staffings regarding students with high risk behaviors, I discuss how the student's history or home life is impacting their behavior."

Building and district administrators are encouraged to think about the trauma-informed organizational practices that are known to ensure every child has equitable access to the protective factors they need to thrive. With federal investment, strategies have been piloted in Multnomah County, but we know that for schools and districts to fully commit to creating trauma-informed school settings, a dedicated staff person is needed on the ground to coordinate and customize these efforts. We ask you to join us in standing up for children impacted by trauma, who need school now more than ever.