

March 13, 2017

RE: Support for HB 2658

Dear Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jenny Bergmans. I am a school social worker, and I currently serve as the Family Services Manager for Community Action: Head Start in Washington County. I supervise seven family services assistants (FSAs) that provide parent engagement and resources for our high-needs families throughout Washington County. They also help children and families who have **barriers to school attendance**. When a child has been absent, teachers notify an FSA. The FSA will work to build a rapport with the family and help them access resources so they can get their child to school. I have seen the tremendous impact that working with the child's family can have on a child's success.

Parent engagement is a pivotal piece of the Head Start mission. This is because we know that when parents are involved in a child's education, he or she is more likely to succeed. We also realize that children can only be ready to learn if they have their basic needs met and are not in fight-or-flight mode.

Research has shown that if children have adverse childhood experiences (or ACES) they are more likely to become sick in the future. ACES may include traumatic experiences such as parental separation, having a parent with a mental illness, substance abuse issue or who is incarcerated, domestic violence in the home, neglect, physical abuse and/or sexual abuse. The more ACES a child has, the higher their likelihood of becoming sick. The effects that ACES may have in the future include things such as heart disease, cancer, mental illness, immune disorders and even suicide. Suicide was the second leading cause of death among persons 10-24 years of age in Oregon in 2013, and the suicide rate among persons 10-24 years of age has been increasing since 2010 (Oregon Health Authority, Jan. 2015). **This is why prevention is key.**

As a past child protective services worker, I can tell you these issues are hidden but running rampant throughout our neighborhoods, rich and poor. **If we are able to ameliorate children's adverse childhood experiences, we will save a vast amount of money in the future on things such as healthcare and drug addiction treatment.**

Social workers are highly educated in trauma-informed practices and Adverse Childhood Experiences. They are also specially trained in working with systems and family issues. For these reasons, they are essential to have in our schools.

Having social workers in schools will help our children and our communities. It will also save us money in the long haul. Please join me in supporting HB 2658.

Sincerely,

Jenny Bergmans, CSWA