



April 11, 2017

Re: SB 944

Dear Legislators,

Together, the Special Education Directors of Clackamas County are asking for your vigorous support for the children and families of our communities by passing the legislation being proposed as SB 944.

The state of Oregon is experiencing a mental health crisis. Every day in our schools students struggle to overcome their mental health issues in order to access their education.

In our schools in Clackamas county alone this year:

- A boy came to school and swallowed razor blades.
- A girl brought a rope to school to hang himself.
- An elementary student wrapped an extension cord around his neck and attempted to jump out a school window.

These are but a few of the heartbreaking stories of a failed mental health system.



The state of Oregon is not meeting the mental health needs of its citizens, according to The State of Mental Health in America 2016, published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) and the Centers for Disease Control. Our place at the bottom in *Overall Ranking*, (based on 13 different measures,) is a result of our high prevalence of mental illness and our low rates of access to care. Our current practice has left students with needs that have been addressed haphazardly and with woeful inadequacy.

The inadequacy of the funding isn't the only concern. Low funding *coupled with a failure to mandate an implementation model of mental health supports for children* has left schools with the burden of providing these needed services. This legislation is a step towards correcting an existing system failure to serve our most impacted children.

When students can't benefit from instruction, expectations are placed upon schools to meet their needs. The taxpayers of Oregon have already paid for mental health supports, sending billions to the Oregon Health Authority, but these dollars are not being effectively directed towards those who need them most. This legislation attempts to redress some of this gap, creating a system of communication and mutual expectation that will improve our practice, and will help increase accountability so that Oregon Health Authority dollars are spent on mental health needs, leaving education dollars to be spent on education. SB 944 will also bring





educators to the table as active participants in the team, giving us a much needed voice in serving our most vulnerable children.

Thank you for your time and willingness to address this need. Your efforts are critical to developing a path toward improving outcomes for children throughout our state.

Respectfully submitted,

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