



## **SB 52: Suicide Prevention Bill**

Letter of Support | February 4, 2019

To Chair Roblan, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and the members of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is Dana Smiley, and I am a Junior at Lincoln High School in Portland, Oregon. I am also the education policy organizer of Oregon Student Voice (OSV), a student-led organization that empowers students to be authentic partners with K-12 decision makers. I am writing on behalf of OSV in support of SB 52. This bill requires school districts to adopt a prescribed policy in regards to student suicide prevention. This bill is extremely important as it provides support and resources necessary to students and implements a procedure in which a school can be held accountable for their response to reports of suicidal risk. In the following, I share how this bill would positively impact my peers and myself.

High school is a time of learning and growth in which many students are just beginning to accept their own identities. Yet harassment in schools is a major, often untreated issue, which when not dealt with, can have serious consequences. The groups SB 52 defines as high-risk correlate with the groups who experience the highest levels of bullying in schools and are at highest suicide risk. Students who experience harassment because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability level, socioeconomic status, or other factors out of their control are likely to feel like outcasts and unwelcome in their schools. One in four students report experience bullying; however, it is estimated roughly 80 percent of cases are unreported. Much of the time when bullying is reported, no action is taken and students are left without support. Causing further challenges, educators currently do not receive the proper training to support students in a crisis and provide them with appropriate resources.

Taking the preventative steps outlined in SB 52 to provide resources and support for the groups of students most likely to experience harassment and become at-risk for suicide is a key step in making schools safe spaces. SB 52 further aims to boost suicide prevention efforts by having educators attend trainings regarding suicide awareness and prevention and providing parents, volunteers, and the school community with information regarding mental health services. The past few years have seen a sharp increase in the number of students suffering from depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, so equipping educators with information to direct students to life saving resources is essential for success in schools.

I, as well as the high school members of Oregon Student Voice, believe that SB 52 is an important step in improving suicide prevention efforts in schools by increasing support for high-risk students and holding schools accountable for their prevention efforts. These reforms will improve school environments in addition to improving the lives of students themselves. We hope that the Senate Committee on Education approves SB 52.

Thank you for your consideration,

*Dana Smiley*  
Oregon Student Voice