



February 6, 2019

TO: Senator Rob Wagner, Chair
Senate Committee on Education
FR: Bob Joondeph, Executive Director
RE: Support for SB 52

Disability Rights Oregon (DRO) is the Protection and Advocacy program for Oregon, advocating for the rights, safety and dignity of Oregonians with disabilities since 1977. DRO supports passage of SB 52 as an important step to address the alarming increase in youth suicide in Oregon.

The rate of anxiety disorders, depression and youth suicide has significantly increased in recent years. Youth with disabilities, including those stemming from mental, emotional and cognitive conditions, are at heightened risk self-harm. Differences alone can be a cause for harassment, bullying and family rejection. People with disabilities are covered by Oregon's hate crime laws in sad recognition that this occurs too frequently. Suicide can be a horrible result of this mistreatment.

Having a supportive adult can greatly reduce the risk of suicide. Many times, students feel most comfortable confiding in the adults that they interact with every day, including teachers and school personnel since schools play an essential role in their lives. That is why we need an effective response system in our schools and create a comprehensive youth suicide prevention plan so schools can be ready with the right knowledge, tools, and resources to address the issue of youth suicide.

Adi's Act will provide all school districts in Oregon with a model suicide prevention policy based on national best practices. In addition, all school districts will be required to have a suicide prevention policy and plan including procedures relating to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention that specifically address youth at higher risk for suicide—like LGBTQ students, youth with disabilities, and youth experiencing homelessness.

Every student in Oregon should be safe, supported, and affirmed while at school. For these reasons, DRO calls on the Oregon legislature to pass SB 52 and also find ways to better fund schools to support our youth.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for this proposed legislation.