

Providence Health & Services
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February 6, 2019

The Honorable Margaret Doherty
Chair, House Committee on Education
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

RE: House Bill 2191 – Excused absence for mental health in Oregon schools

Dear Representative Doherty and members of the committee:

Providence Health & Services is proud to express our support for House Bill 2191 and the work of Students for a Health Oregon.

As Oregon's largest provider of behavioral health services, Providence is committed to ensuring that people of all ages have timely access to comprehensive, high-quality care. In addition to our direct service to patients, Providence is working to improve the mental health and well-being of individuals in our communities – especially children – before they require clinical intervention. One of our goals for this work is to encourage teens, and their parents, to overcome the stigma associated with mental health and talk openly about their concerns.

Over the past two years, the insights and observations of Oregon high-school have had a tremendous influence over Providence's priorities. In conversations students have raised important questions about how schools function, the support they need and identified fairly simple solutions to improve the overall health and well-being of Oregon students – House Bill 2191 is one of those solutions.

Today, Oregon allows individual schools to determine which absences, other than illness or family emergency, should be excused. Some schools do not recognize mental illness as an excused absence – requiring the student, or their parent, to either claim they have a cold or not be able to make-up tests and homework. By not explicitly recognizing mental health as an excused absence we are adding further stigma to a common and treatable condition. House Bill 2191 addresses this issue by equalizing physical and mental health in school absence policies.

Providence strongly encourages the committee to join us in support of House Bill 2191.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin Henderson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robin Henderson, PsyD
Chief Executive, Behavioral Health
Providence Health & Services - Oregon