

February 6, 2019

Representative Margaret Doherty, Chair
House Education Committee

RE: Support House Bill 2191



Chair Doherty and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Derek Evans. I'm a senior at Sandy High School in Sandy, Oregon. I'm a member of Students for a Healthy Oregon – a coalition of Oregon high school students that have come together to improve the mental health and well-being of students. We recognize that students, teachers and families are struggling to identify and adequately address mental health needs in a timely and effective manner across the state. In response, we have identified 2019 legislative priorities that begin to address this need. I'm here today to ask for your support for House Bill 2191.

House Bill 2191 is important to me, and my peers, as it allows students to take their health into their own hands. Students across Oregon, and the US alike, have been prone to silently suffering throughout the school year, as we are not currently allowed to take mental health days to lessen the effects of any mental health conditions. Excusing these absences would not only allow for happier students, but would also allow students to make up tests or assignments that they would generally miss during an unexcused mental health day. This proposal has been thoroughly thought through to not only support the mental health of students, but to provide the opportunity for students to thrive despite their conditions.

As an advocate for positive mental health, and mental health policy, I do find it fitting to share that I personally am in need of mental health days. I deal with high functioning anxiety, which has restricted me from prioritizing my mental health due to the fact that it is not a physical illness, and therefore is not excused. The thought of missing school for an unexcused mental health day only adds to the anxiety that I already deal with, and I can assure you that this is a common trend among students. Although I cannot speak for all students dealing with mental health conditions, I can attest that this bill is long overdue, and will provide nothing but growth for future generations of students. House Bill 2191 is the lifeline that students have been in need of for years, and it is an opportunity for growth in every way.

I want to thank the committee for giving us the time to share our experiences and stories, and for taking this measure into consideration. As a student leader, and a student who struggles with a mental health condition, I urge the committee and house to pass House Bill 2191, for the benefit of students all across Oregon. Thank you.