



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 Leina McLaughlin. I'm a student at Sherwood High School in Sherwood, Oregon. I'm a member of Students for a Healthy Oregon and I'm here today to ask for your support for House Bill 2191.

House Bill 2191 is important because it allows students struggling with mental health issues to get excused absences just as if they had the stomach bug. One in 9 children struggle with a severe emotional disturbance in their lives. At my school that means about 180 students are struggling every day. At many schools in Oregon mental illness doesn't count as a reason for an excused absence. This means those students are unable to make up tests, and some receive punishments like after school suspension, Saturday school, or referrals. By passing House Bill 2191 we are telling kids that it's okay if you need a day to get over a bout of depression and we are helping to lift the stigma around mental illness.

I've been speaking to my friends about the issue of missing school due to mental illnesses. Every single student including myself knows that if you need a mental health day you call in physically sick. We know that if a fellow student is having an anxiety attack they'll have better luck going to the bathroom and crying it out than trying to explain to our schools that they need to go home. This only further develops the stigma around mental health. If our school can't acknowledge a mental illness as an important one they are sending the message to students like me that we need to "toughen up" and "work through it" without help, without support, and without a break from the issues that are making mental health so hard.

Thank you for spending the time to hear our bill. I really hope you pass House Bill 2191 and prove to me and my peers that you care about and support our struggles with mental health. Thank you!