



To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Nancy Willard, Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

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Re: SB 548 (and HB 2224 and SB 12)

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I work in the field of bullying prevention, which necessarily incorporates other issues of trauma informed practices, suicide and violence prevention, effective discipline and the like. I was author of the first book ever published addressing concerns of cyberbullying, *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress*, (Research Press, 2007); *Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens: Helping Young People Learn To Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly* (Jossey-Bass, 2007); *Cyber Savvy: Embracing Digital Safety and Civility* (Corwin, 2011); *Engage Students to Embrace Civility* (Embrace Civility in the Digital Age, 2018); and *Be Positively Powerful: An Empowerment Plan for Teens Who Are Bullied or Harassed*. (Embrace Civility in the Digital Age, 2018). I have a M.S. in Special Education from the University of Oregon and a J.D. from Willamette University College of Law.

Second only to provisions that increase funding for schools in Oregon, it is my opinion that the passage of SB 584 and HB 2224 should be considered to be of highest importance. As I know the Joint Interim Committee for Student Success heard in their travels, we are faced with significant challenges to the social and emotional well-being of Oregon's students. Greater efforts must be made to ensure their well-being. The rates of youth suicides are steadily rising. There has been no decline in the rate at which students report being bullied or harassed.

Years ago, I worked in the field of educational technology. I wrote a plan for the Willamette ESD that set forth an approach to provide Internet services to all of the schools in the Willamette ESD region. While the largest district, Salem Keizer, had robust technology services, it was clear that the smaller districts faced significantly greater challenges in moving forward to implement Internet access.

The plan I wrote for Willamette ESD became the foundation for the establishment of the Oregon Public Education Network. This plan ensured more rapid provision of Internet services to all Oregon districts because of the ability to provide coordinated access at a regional level. I later traveled much of the state, working through the ESDs, to assist many Oregon districts in writing their first Technology Literacy Plans. It was in this way that I learned of the great potential of the ESDs in providing valuable services, especially to the smaller districts in our state.

**Based on my experience, my perception is that there the best way to ensure that all Oregon districts have access to current research insight into strategies to address these pressing concerns is to rely on the Oregon's ESDs as a conduit to provide assistance and support to all Oregon districts.**

There are, however, some concerns with the current language in SB 548. As the plans for this proposal emerged from the Oregon School Safety Task Force, the current language in the bill is too focused on "threats" and "violence." It is strongly recommended that this language be shifted to a focus on mental health promotion.

I think it is important to note that when the Tip Line was originally conceived, the strong focus was on "threats." and the importance of close connections between schools and law enforcement. If one looks at the reports coming into the Tip Line, the situations are predominantly mental health and peer relationship concerns. Thus, It is important in our thinking to ensure that we are maintaining an appropriate focus.

Maintaining a broader focus is especially important in Section 3 (c). At the present time, the Salem-Keizer School district has developed what is recognized as an excellent threat assessment protocol. However, in addition, the

Oregon Health Authority has provided the Oregon School Suicide Protocol Toolkit, which offers a variety of templates for how to conduct an assessment of risk of suicide. The concern of students who are engaging in behavior that is causing a substantial disruption and “room clears” has more recently emerged as an issue.

It is important that the language in this section be shifted to focus on the need to both develop a more global risk assessment and then to implement and evaluate its effectiveness in schools. Thus, both the language of this Section needs to change and it will be important to ensure funding is available to support the development of a more global risk assessment tool, which can then be disseminated and evaluated.

A larger concern relates to the current lack of integration between SB 584 and HB 2224. HB 2224 provides for extensive funding to improve student outcomes by supporting social, emotional, mental and physical health needs of students. The bill directs the Oregon Department of Education to create list of recommended curricula and training for students and school employees related to social and emotional learning, trauma-informed care and other student mental health issues.

The current anticipated outcome of SB 584 is to establish prevention specialists within the ESDs to support their regional school districts on issues related bullying, suicide, and violence. To effectively do this, the prevention specialists clearly will need to focus on social and emotional learning, trauma-informed care and other student mental health issues.

Thus, I would strongly recommended that the language of SB 584 (3) be shifted to to provide that the ESD prevention specialists will focus on strategies to improve student outcomes by supporting social, emotional, mental and physical health needs of students, including trauma informed practices, bullying, youth suicide, and violence.

In this way, the combination of HB 2224 and SB 584 will allow for the provision of resources to school districts to implement programs, the establishment of resources through the Oregon Department of Education, and the provision of mental health promotion services to the districts through the regional ESD prevention specialists.

It is also recommended that consideration be given to integrating a section that is currently in SB 12 into SB 584. SB 12 is focused on the establishment of inclusive schools that are implementing practices, strategies and programs that provide a welcoming learning environment. While the language is slightly different, this bill addresses the same concerns as SB 584 and HB 2224.

SB 12 (2)(a) provides that the Department of Education will oversee a network of regional student councils. The regional student councils are to be administered by the ESDs. Given that SB 584 is focused on the delivery of services to districts through the ESDs, incorporation of the regional student councils into this delivery mechanism would appear logical.

(SB 12 also calls for the establishment of student and family advisory group, which I am going to recommend be incorporated into HB 2224 to ensure appropriate student an family participation in the development of approaches to support the social, emotional, mental and physical health needs of students. SB 12 also calls for funding for pilot projects. Funding for programs in this area is the primary focus of HB 2224. Thus, there appears to be some unfortunate redundancy.)

With respect to the Tip Line itself, I have never been a fan of tip lines. There are huge concerns about students reporting concerns to school staff. Providing anonymity is not going to effectively address these concerns. The concerns are grounded in the fact that many students simply do not trust that school officials are going to respond in a way that makes things better.

Data from the Eugene 4J school district is helpful. In spring 2018, close to 9% of 4J’s students reported they were being bullied or harassed once a week or more. Two-thirds of these students said they would not tell a staff member to get help. Look at the OHT or SWS data on student reported rates of bullying.harassment, suicide ideation, taking weapons to school. Consider what this data says about how frequently these situations are actually being reported to the school.

Now look at the data from the Oregon Tip Line: <https://www.safeoregon.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SafeOregon-2017-2018-Annual-Report-0615181.pdf>. Based on an analysis of this data, there are 998 schools signed up for the Tip Line. The total number of tips received in the time from January 2017 to June 2018 was 1584 tips. That is 1.6 tips per school.

The vast majority of the tips, 41%, were associated with bullying. Note that when a student reports on the Tip Line, unless there is a pending violent incident, the report simply goes to the principal. However, nowhere on the site is this information provided. A significant question that should be asked is what are the circumstances that students who are being bullied would decide to report to the Tip Line, rather than to their principal. Are they reporting to the Tip Line because prior reports to their principal did not effectively resolve the situation? What happens after a Tip Line report? Does the situation then get resolved?

However, it does appear that a significant portion of the tips are made after school hours, so this is likely a benefit. Clearly, there are some significant stories of success. How does this compare to situations where a young person simply called the police or other authority when they had concerns.

It is my understanding that the contract for the Tip Line will be expiring. It would be helpful, in my opinion, to look closely at the data and to also compare the results of the Tip Line with the results of Lines for Life YouthLine, a teen-to-teen support line. It is my understanding that they received 13,000 contacts last year. I am not sure the geographical outreach of their program. My personal opinion is that there may be some greater benefit in ensuring that students know that they can contact YouthLine to gain assistance for many of the situations that are currently being reported to the Tip Line.

I will also be submitting an article I have written entitled *How Wide Is Your Net?* that addresses these concerns. This article has been accepted for publication in a magazine called District Administration.

Thus, in summation:

- **A delivery mechanism that places prevention specialists within the ESDs to provide services to districts should be considered to be imperative.**
- Language that focuses on “threat assessment” should be shifted to “risk assessment” that incorporates threats of violence, concerns of suicide ideation, and other situations where students behavior has caused a substantial disruption or has raised significant concerns.
- It is recommended that language from HB 2224 related to improving student outcomes by supporting social, emotional, mental and physical health needs of students be incorporated into SB 584 so that it is clear that the prevention specialists will be providing support and assistance for districts in implementing programs they have received funding for through HB 2224.
- Provisions from SB 12 related to regional student councils should be added to SB 584.
- At some time, a more substantive analysis of the actual effectiveness of the Tip Line, as well as alternatives that may be more helpful needs to occur.