

Good afternoon,

Chair Doherty, members of the committee, for the record, my name is Torrie Dowdy, and I am a kindergarten teacher at the Gladstone Center for Children and Families. I graduated with my BS in early childhood education from OSU and my MAT from Lewis and Clark College. I taught third and fourth grade for four years in rural eastern Oregon and for the last four years I have been teaching Kindergarten in my hometown of Gladstone.

I speak here now in front of all of you, to fight for students across the state. The students who scream, kick, punch, and bite because they don't know how else to get their pain and needs across. I speak here now for every teacher who goes to bed at night and wakes up every morning worried that they aren't enough or can't go on because they don't know how to get students ready for the next grade when their class is in constant crisis.

In the last four years alone, I have been physically and verbally abused by my students and have conducted countless room clears. I have stood by and watched as everything on my classroom walls has been destroyed while also trying to urgently usher my students to safety in the teachers room next door. I have been slapped and hit numerous times while trying to protect students from attacking others. I have been called every vulgar name you could possibly imagine, all while teaching kindergarten.

But as these events are happening, all I can think is how the student causing the disruption is hurting and how much trauma has lead to that student tearing apart the art projects of their classmates, throwing every book on to the floor, and screaming at me until they are breathless.

This problem does not just fall to a socioeconomic divide, but a systemic issue in our lack to address the social and emotional health of our children.

Everyday teachers are dealing with this and everyday teachers return to work because we are often the child's only consistent support.

Across the state, in every school, we lack resources, both monetary and staff, and have for too many years. Our secretaries, principals, specialists, assisting staff and teachers are burnt out. We have taken on so much of the weight of other positions because there isn't the staff available to do the jobs we need. In my district alone, we have one counselor who splits her time between two buildings and 750+ students. So it often falls to teachers to assess the needs of our students and provide support, when often we don't have the background or tools to do so.

With House Bill 2224 schools all over the state would be able to access vital resources, add support staff and partner with outside agencies to better assist our students. Districts would be able to provide wraparound services for families, like the center I teach in does.

As a state, we have let our children down. We have put them on the back burner thinking that the recession and lack of funding hasn't affected them. I have had students watch as I've been hit, as I've been spit on, as I've been called expletives too profane to repeat here today and often while this is happening it is difficult to get the other students out and away from witnessing these traumatizing events, but sadly it has become a norm which has stripped our students of valuable learning time.

We need support, we need help, and boots on the ground if for no other reason than for our children and their future.

Thank you.