

February 13, 2019

The Honorable Margaret Doherty
900 Court St. NE, H-282
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Madam Chair Doherty,

My name is Esther Jacobson-Tepfer. I have been an educator for over 45 years, on the Board of Directors of Ophelia's Place for eight years, and am currently its President. I'm writing to urge your support for House Bill 2604. This bill would designate \$6 million to Oregon middle and high schools to support bullying prevention programming.

Like so many others, I am increasingly concerned by the extent to which our young people are experiencing bullying in their public schools. The statistics are overwhelming. Almost 30% of Oregon middle school students have been bullied at school in the last 30 days. And 59% of U.S. teens have been bullied or harassed online. Bullying makes a lasting impact on the social and educational wellbeing of students; all too often it leads a child to depression and even suicide. We all know too well that people who are bullied learn that behavior as a way to deal with others in later life.

Ophelia's Place is a prevention-based organization dedicated to helping youth make healthy life choices through empowerment, education, and support. Among other services, Ophelia's Place provides presentations and trainings in middle and high schools that cover topics like Peers As Allies (bullying prevention), and Building Positive Relationships. Nearly 6,400 students were served in the 2017-2018 school year through our Full School Partnership Program, and the results have been positive.

According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, more than half of bullying incidents can be stopped by peer intervention at school. By giving young people the tools they need to navigate their teen years, our children have a greater chance at avoiding difficult situations that can be costly to the state, to schools, to families, and to youth themselves.

House Bill 2604 would allow schools to partner with community organizations to provide bullying prevention programming to students, parents, and educators. A holistic approach that involves all three partners working together has a greater chance of creating a culture of empathy and inclusion, and a space for students to be focused on learning instead of their next bully encounter. At \$45 per middle school student in Oregon, passing this bill would be a wise investment in today's youth and their futures.

I urge you to support and pass House Bill 2604.

Sincerely,

Esther Jacobson-Tepfer
President, Ophelia's Place Board of Directors
Eugene, OR