

Joint Student Success Committee

April 15, 2019

Testimony of Teri Conklin, Communications Coordinator of Ophelia's Place

HB 3427, HB 2019 and SB 180

Co-Chair Roblan, Co-Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee:

My name is Teri Conklin, the communications coordinator for Ophelia's Place. I too am advocating for bullying prevention and youth empowerment.

You've heard the statistics – 30% of our middle schools students reported being bullied at school in just the past month in Oregon, and according to the Pew Research Center nearly 60% of U.S. teens have been bullied on-line. And those are just the average numbers – the numbers are much higher among our most vulnerable students including those who are perceived as different by their peers, including students with disabilities, LGBTQ students, students of color, and socially-isolated youth.

We know we have a crisis on our hands. But with your help, students don't have to wait for safer school climates and greater self-esteem that have causal positive impacts on graduation rates, attendance rates, and students meeting 9th-grade on track goals. We know a holistic approach that includes education and support for students, teachers and parents works, and we know how reach more students.

While Ophelia's Place is one organization that can provide bullying prevention programs to schools, organizations like Girls Inc., Stand for Courage, Polk County Mental Health, Domestic Violence agencies and the Sheriff's offices in some counties are facilitating behavioral support groups. For schools that don't have local agencies to access, a bi-annual bullying prevention conference would provide all secondary schools in Oregon the chance to learn about proven models, gain skills, and find resources.

Schools in under-resourced and rural communities are already reaching out to Ophelia's Place for help and are seeing immediate results. In Junction City, for example, the middle school counselor reported a drop of nearly 50% in referrals after Ophelia's Place conducted student empowerment groups.

We receive written feedback from students after they receive any of our classroom presentations. After our "Peers as Allies" presentation, which speaks to bullying, the following feedback came from 6th graders in the Eugene and Springfield School Districts:

"It was great and helped me understand why people bully people" –Male, 6th grade

“I feel much more stronger to tell a person if I am being bullied” –Female, 6th grade

“Thank you for taking time for us and caring.” –Male, 6th grade

“Thank you for your help. I never really reported but now I do. Thank you.” - Male, 6thgrade

At the end of a pilot of Ophelia’s Place’s Full School Partnership program, Springfield Public Schools reported that of those students who participated, 92% said they were more confident in developing, engaging and in navigating healthy relationships with others, and 75% said they were more confident in handling internet safety, including cyberbullying.

We know a holistic approach makes real impacts. Both the comparative study about our Full School Partnership Programs that Verna shared, and these reported impacts from school staff and students themselves show direct results our approach has on students.

Prevention is the key to laying the foundation for safe and healthy school environments. Thank you for including bullying prevention within your legislation.