

**From the Desk of  
Sen. Wagner**



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 Hailey Hardcastle. I'm a senior at Sherwood High School 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 to me because it would reaffirm the idea that mental illness is no different than physical illness and it would offer support to the masses of students that are struggling with mental health challenges every day. One in nine children struggle with a severe emotional disturbance in their lives. That means that about 180 students at my school are struggling every day. At many schools in Oregon mental illness doesn't count as a reason for an excused absence. This means students that have to miss school for those reasons are unable to make up tests, and some receive punishments like after school detention or Saturday school as a result. By passing bill 2191 we are telling students, like those 180 at my school, that it's okay if you need to take a day to work through a bout of depression or anxiety and we are helping to lift the stigma around mental illness.

I'd like you to imagine a student. They look like they have it all together: good grades, lots of friends, and perfect attendance. One day what's usually some mild anxiety starts to grow. They're sitting in class and feel like they can't breathe or speak. They have no idea what the teacher is saying because their anxious thoughts drown out everything else. They may even start to cry. They're having an anxiety attack and school is the last place they should be right now. I've seen this happen time and time again at my school and it's even happened to me. The important thing is that just like a physical illness, like a common cold, mental illness can affect anyone, no matter how they look on the outside. Often times a day to work through their challenges are all that stands between feeling a bit better and feeling a lot worse because the issue was ignored.

While Oregon schools have taken enormous strides to protect the health of our students we still have a long way to go to ensure the lasting wellbeing of our students. This bill would validate the struggles that so many students are going through and teach them how to take of themselves when they inevitably face mental health challenges at some point in their life.

Thank you so much for hearing our bill today. On behalf of myself and my peers please pass House Bill 2191 to support the health and wellbeing of the students of Oregon.

# Improve the mental health and well-being of Oregon students

Students for a Healthy Oregon is a coalition of Oregon high school students that have come together to improve the mental health and well-being of students. Across the state students, teachers and families are struggling to identify and adequately address mental health needs in a timely and effective manner. Our 2019 legislative priorities begin to address this need.



## Equalize physical and mental health (HB 2191)

**Background:** Oregon Law allows individual schools to determine which absences, other than illness or family emergency, should be excused. Some schools do not recognize mental illness as an excused absence – requiring the student, or their parent, to either claim they have a cold or not be able to make-up tests and homework. By not explicitly recognizing mental health as an excused absence we are adding further stigma to a common and treatable condition.

### **Solution:**

For an absence to be excused Oregon Law should recognize both physical and mental illness.

## Students for a Healthy Oregon is lead by:

Finlay Bates, Forest Grove High School  
Elia Whyte, Grants Pass High School  
Shawna Ashley Ingram, Hillsboro High School

Cassie Kool, Hillsboro High School  
Lori Riddle, Hillsboro High School  
Harrison Welch, Hillsboro High School  
Conner Barnett, Jesuit High School  
Tristan Weimer, La Grande High School  
RoseLynn Davis, McMinnville High School  
Colin Salewski, McMinnville High School  
Junet Lugo, Milwaukie High School  
Grant Didway, Oregon City High School  
Taylor Hayes, Oregon City High School  
Leah Kemeny, Oregon City High School  
Kamilah McKenzie, Oregon Connections Academy  
J.J. Riddell, Redmond High School

Chloee Nelson, Reynolds High School  
Derek Evans, Sandy High School  
Mya Carpenter, Scappoose High School  
Samantha Irwin, Scappoose High School  
Shayna Redpath, Scappoose High School  
Sam Adamson, Sherwood High School  
Hailey Hardcastle, Sherwood High School  
Hannah Karp, Sherwood High School  
Leina McLaughlin, Sherwood High School  
Maryanna Mejia, Sherwood High School  
Keren Weisenborn, Southridge High School  
Logan Holler, Summit High School  
Matthew Brown, Tualatin High School  
Teddy Fronczak, Tualatin High School  
Bailey Langley, Tualatin High School  
Lupita Ruiz, Tualatin High School  
Billie Henderson, West Linn High School

### **Students for a Healthy Oregon**

Oregon high school students advocating for the mental health and well-being of all Oregon students.