

February 3, 2020

Chair Doherty and Members of the House Committee on Education:

I am a community member and I respectfully request the committee's support of House Bill 4132, the Oregon Student Health Survey Bill. To work towards equity in health and education, we need to understand the scope of issues facing our youth and be responsive to their needs by, for instance, ensuring that our health education standards are implemented, which include LGBTQ+ inclusivity; consent and healthy relationships; sexual activity and HIV/AIDS knowledge; child abuse prevention; bullying and school safety. The Oregon Student Health Survey is the only source of statewide data on school climate and the health & well-being of Oregon students.

In an OHA survey of all 197 school districts, only 35 school districts reported having the required plan of instruction for sex ed. We must support this survey to ensure we are collecting the most accurate data about teen health possible so we can make informed decisions.

Oregon law requires sex education curricula that are developmentally appropriate and LGBTQ+ inclusive. But because decisions about sex education are largely made at the local level, Oregon is a patchwork of inconsistent laws and policies that make access to sex education inequitable.

Why it's important to me that Oregon's public school students have access to comprehensive, age-appropriate, and LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual health education

Sex education is widely supported by a majority of Americans and by the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. In fact, more than 90% of parents support sex education in both middle and high school. And the vast majority of parents, including Democrats and Republicans, want sex education to include topics like sexually transmitted infections, birth control, abstinence, sexual orientation, personal safety, healthy relationships, decision making and communication skill building. We need accurate data and a well-supported health survey in order to know where the needs for sex education and issues such as rising STI rates are in each community around the state. Supporting HB 4132 gets us closer to this critical information.

As a teen, I did not have access to comprehensive, inclusive sex education. In my household, sex was never discussed. I remember my mom asking me if I knew what sex was, once, after I had already begun to be sexually active. Because I did not feel comfortable going to my parents to ask questions, I looked to my peers, who had the

same sex ed I did. I received incomplete information, did not use birth control as consistently as I should have, and relied on tracking my cycles to prevent pregnancy. When I was sixteen I had a pregnancy scare. When I was seventeen, my annual pap smear came back abnormal; I was terrified I had HPV or cervical cancer. While I did not have an STI or cervical cancer, this event scared me, and prompted me to seek out more information. I am thirty now, and I still learn things about my body and sexuality that surprise me and that I wish I had known when I was young. Young people need complete, comprehensive, accurate, and inclusive information about sex and relationships.

Please codify and fund the Oregon Student Health Survey and provide the critical resources necessary to help schools and communities make data-informed decisions about the health and well-being of their students now and for years to come.

Sincerely,

Kate Normand
Salem, OR