

Hello,

Please accept the attached testimony for the public record in support of HB 4132.

Please let me know if you have any questions-

Ericka C. Thessen

February 1, 2020

Chair Doherty and Members of the House Committee on Education:

I am a parent of students at Kennedy Middle and Churchill High schools in Eugene 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 is 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. All young people and communities, no matter where they live, have the right to the information and skills they need to protect their health and plan their futures. We must equip our state with the very best information possible to make informed decisions. The Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Department of Education are doing a wonderful job with limited resources and we must step up to support this survey more fully. Why it's important to me is that my three students in 4J school district need to 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.

Young people need access to information and resources that include consent and healthy relationships — starting well before college and well before they become

sexually active — to help them understand how to ask for consent, respect personal boundaries, and learn how to say and receive a “no.”

Two out of three of my children are LGBTQ. Recently, my 12 year old daughter, who already has had some sex education in schools asked me “mom, can lesbians like me even get each other pregnant or have babies?” I realized that at that moment that her sexual education and her parenting from myself had fallen short of being inclusive and including what her reality and truth look like.

Also, I am a survivor of HPV and cervical cancer. I know that if I had access to science based sexual education and info about prevention such as HPV vaccine, I would not have had to battle cervical cancer and endure surgeries and procedures to beat the HPV infection. Having codified science based and inclusive sexual education helps all our children and students have the life saving health information to keep themselves protected.

I respectfully request the committee’s support of House Bill 4132, the Oregon Student Health Survey Bill. 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. This survey gives educators and health partners the necessary information to support the health, well-being, and academic achievement of Oregon youth. Please vote yes on House Bill 4132 to give educators and health partners the necessary data to support the health, well-being and academic achievement of Oregon youth.

Sincerely,
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