

March 8, 2021

House Committee on Behavioral Health

House Bill 2315

Chair, Vice-Chairs, and Committee Members:

Hello, my name is Kahae Rikeman and I am the School Suicide Prevention and Wellness Program Manager at Lines for Life. My job is a part of the YouthLine program, a peer-to-peer support line for youth in crisis and a service of Lines for Life. I am here to testify in favor of House Bill 2315, requiring mental health professionals to complete 6 hours in continuing education on suicide.

The School Suicide Prevention and Wellness Program at Lines for Life works directly with school districts across the state regarding best practices in suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. Suicide is a public health crisis in Oregon's youth. I strongly believe that any mental health professional should have the tools to recognize the signs that a person they are helping is having thoughts of suicide. Thoughts of suicide impact people of all backgrounds, identities, and circumstances. It is almost inevitable that while working as a mental health professional you will work with someone who reports thoughts of suicide.

Personally, I have spoken to many counselors that report that when they haven't gone through a suicide intervention training and are speaking to a young person at risk for suicide, they feel unprepared, scared, and wish that they had more tools to help. Most professionals that I have spoken to want to access more training, but without a mandate, their time is pulled into other required professional development. With the passing of this bill, the counselors that I work with can prioritize getting this vital and lifesaving training.

Quite frankly, this is a life and death issue for people seeking mental health services in our state. A mental health professional having a compassionate, calm, and evidence-based response to thoughts of suicide is crucial in keeping a person safe from suicide. Without these trainings, professionals can miss signs that a person is having thoughts of suicide, not respond in a way that is helpful, or create inadequate safety plans that are further traumatizing.

Mental health professionals in our state have the power to change the tide of how many people in Oregon are dying by suicide. I am grateful for the opportunity to express the School Suicide Prevention and Wellness Program's full support for this bill.