



3/18/2021

Attn: House Committee on Health Care, Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Hayden and Salinas, and members of the committee

From: Oregon Health Equity Alliance

Re: Testimony in support of HB 2591

Greetings Chair Patterson, Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Hayden and Salinas, and members of the committee. We are writing to you on behalf of the Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA) in support of HB 2591, the School Health Expansion Act.

Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA) is a people-of-color led collaborative, organized to center and uplift the wisdom of our communities of color through racial justice-informed health equity policies and practices. This is a part of the movement to dismantle white supremacy and shift the imbalance of power in our state. We are also one of six Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs) across the state, representing Washington, Clackamas, and Multnomah counties.

Health equity is achieved when every member of our community has the resources, opportunities, power, and autonomy to attain their full health potential. We are testifying in support of HB 2591 as we believe that expanding opportunities for school districts to understand the needs of their students, as well as provide subsequent health services, is crucial for our communities' thrival. School-based health centers (SBHCs) provide essential, regular preventative care and treatment for many students and families who would not have access to health services otherwise ([this includes mental health services which have quadrupled since 2013](#)). This is especially important for youth and families of color, as many have reported that SBHCs are often their only link to consistent health care services ([in 26 of 78 SBHCs, at least half of school-age clients were youth of color](#)). Moreover, given the ways the pandemic has disproportionately impacted these same communities, it becomes imperative to support these students' and families' health needs as some navigate new levels of trauma and stress as a result of the pandemic.

HB 2591 provides supports for developing mobile school-linked health centers and a telehealth model with school nurses that are located in different schools. This allows for innovative approaches to addressing health and culturally specific workforce issues. First, it enhances culturally competent care by reducing geographic boundaries which is important for youths and families in rural communities. Secondly, it supports students who would rather use telehealth with a culturally specific provider than see a local provider that doesn't understand their needs. Whether a community member lives within a rural community and/or is a youth of color, students and their families deserve access to quality, comprehensive health care that is

unbiased and culturally responsive. Thus, we urge the committee to invest in the health and safety of our communities by creating more opportunities for folks to get the care they need.

We believe this is an incredibly important bill and we hope we can count on your support to ensure the passage of HB 2591.

In health,

Ujuonu Nwizu

Community Engagement and Advocacy Strategist, Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA)