



March 25, 2021

House Education Committee,

I have been asked to write this letter of support, as a mental health clinical supervisor at Albertina Kerr Centers, to continue the funding for Oak Grove Academy. Most of our clients in the Hillsboro and Forest Grove District (approximately 41 youths) are currently being served by Oak Grove Academy. Albertina Kerr Centers currently has ten group homes that receive services in this area. We provide residential services to youths who present with an intellectual developmental disability and mental health (IDDMH) challenges. Most have had multiple failed previous placements in school districts, as well as in their living situations. Youths in our care are often placed in these specific homes to allow access to Oak Grove Academy for their educational and supportive needs.

As a mental health professional, I have found the collaboration between our program and Oak Grove Academy to be successful in addressing the complex needs of this population. I can attest to the unique quality of mental health and academic programming Oak Grove Academy brings to this often underserved population. Historically, these individuals have struggled within school settings and are often denied entry into traditional day treatment programs because of their co-occurring developmental and mental health needs. Oak Grove Academy not only services this population consistently, it has been successful preparing them for their next steps educationally. Our students have been able to transition back to their home school; the intense services provided meets their necessary emotional needs, provides stability, and prepares them for academic challenges.

As an advocate for this vulnerable population and a mental health professional with over 20 years of experience, I ask each of you to recognize the need for individuals with complex IDDMH challenges to have access to these essential educational and mental health services. Currently, there is no other program in Washington County that provides comparable comprehensive services to those at Oak Grove Academy. It would be a devastating loss to these individuals, who have already experienced an abundance of failure in their lives, to be denied access to an academic program that has proven to be successful.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the importance for continuing the funding for Oak Grove Academy.

Regards,

Laurie Lusk, LCSW

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