

April 23, 2021

To: Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

From: Tanya M Pritt, Director YES House (Youth Entering Sobriety)

Re: SB563

Dear Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Anderson and Committee Members:

Please accept this written testimony in support of SB563. For the past 29 years I have been employed as the director for a residential substance abuse treatment center for adolescents in Corvallis, Oregon.

During my tenure, suicide and suicide attempts has been a part of the make-up, if you will, of the substance abuse assessments we have completed as children came into care. Children who have lost a parent, relative and sometimes a sibling. When I entered the field of substance abuse counseling I never would have thought that suicide prevention would become my focus. And then, almost 40 years ago, a teenage client with a year clean and sober killed herself. She was only 17. And preventing suicide is became a focus in my work in addiction.

The Alliance was established when Oregon suffered clusters of young people dying by suicide. Corvallis had more suicide completions than any other city in Oregon per capita. I became angered and frustrated by the loss of young life and was compelled to address the issue as a part of treatment.

Today, largely due to the legislative efforts of Senator Gelser, suicide prevention skills training has become an available source of education for all health care professionals in Oregon. The onboarding process at YES House makes it mandatory that all staff receive training in this area. I sincerely hope we can make a difference for the youth and parents in Oregon. It is through my work that I know many of the youth entering SUD treatment have had suicidal thoughts and impulses. SB563 changes the statute relating to youth suicide to include all young people below the age of 24, rather than limiting it to ages 10 to 24. We just miss so much.

This change is sorely needed because a small number of Oregon children under age 10 have died by suicide in recent years. I understand that SB563 will ensure that OHA is able to accurately report these numbers. It is also important that our suicide prevention planning includes support for young children after a suicide occurs in their family or circle. Providing therapeutic and other supports after the loss of a parent or other significant person in a child's life is a key prevention strategy. Research shows that losing someone to suicide increases the risk of substance abuse as well as long-term risk of the loss survivor dying by suicide. I urge you to support SB563.

Sincerely,

*Tanya M Pritt*

Director, YES House  
541-619-4666