

Hello, my name is Erika Schwartz. I'm on the board of Serendipity Center and am here to ask for an investment \$2.8M to help fund a facility expansion.

I have three points I'd like to make about this urgent request.

- 1) Serendipity Center is a nonprofit therapeutic school that serves students from over 20 school districts who are so impacted by their emotional and behavioral health needs that their neighborhood schools can't provide an appropriate placement. Serendipity operates at capacity every year and maintains a waiting list. A waiting list means kids are waiting for a place to help them.
- 2) Mental health in youth is at a crisis point in Oregon and Serendipity has a proven track record of integrating mental health and trauma-informed services into a school day for over 40 years. In fact, 88% of students referred to Serendipity with histories of multiple failed school placements remained enrolled, graduated or successfully transitioned back to their home schools.
- 3) Due to the growing mental health crisis resulting from Covid, we anticipate a significant increase in referrals. As a special educator myself, I know how hard this year has been for our kids; they are suffering. An expansion is crucial to meet this growing need.

I know that \$2.8M is a lot of money. Someone recently reminded me to think of it in terms of a cost comparison and the comparison must consider the cost of not expanding as well as the cost to the individual child, to their families, to their teachers who may be so focused on managing behaviors that they aren't able to teach, to their classmates whose learning is disrupted, and to the larger community of taxpayers who will have to contend with providing services to people who have aged out of school-based services without the self regulation, communication, and transition skills needed to live as independently as possible.

An investment of \$2.8M for a facility expansion of Serendipity Center is an investment in our community.