

Oregon House of Representatives  
Committee on Education  
The Honorable Courtney Neron, Chair  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301



Dear Chair Neron and Members of the Committee:

I am Heather Jefferis executive director of the Oregon Council for Behavioral health. My testimony today is in support of HB 2646. The Oregon Council for Behavioral Health (OCBH) represents just under 70 community-based non-profit providers of mental health and substance use disorder education and treatment that coordinate and provide services to more than 400,000 Oregonians.

House Bill 2646 will ensure that Oregon's school personnel have the training and knowledge necessary to recognize and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges in students by requiring employees to complete an evidence-based behavioral health training and establishing mental health points of contact at each school to support youth and their families in accessing services and resources.

Research shows that 1 in 5 adolescents have had a serious mental health challenge at some point in their life, and that LGBTQ+ youth experience mental health disorders at a significantly higher rate. A [survey](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that in 2021, 44 percent of high school students indicated that they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year.

It is critical that we learn how to recognize early warning signs of possible crisis, and how to respond effectively, including connecting students to help. This is especially important for educators who spend hours every day with their students and are uniquely positioned to identify those students who might be struggling with a mental health or substance use challenge.

Programs like Youth Mental Health First Aid teach educators, school personnel, and others who are in regular contact with youth how to understand, identify, and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges. Research shows that the sooner people get help for mental health and substance use concerns; the more likely they are to have positive outcomes. This training can be as essential as CPR or First Aid- when individuals can identify the signs and immediately know what steps to take to get help.

Young people and their well-being are at the forefront of our work, and this bill is a vital step towards ensuring that students' behavioral health is recognized as a crucial component of their ability to thrive—in school and beyond—with the support of the adults who spend hours with them every day.

We believe this bill is an important step towards ensuring school personnel are equipped to help our students and we strongly urge your support in expanding access to mental health resources in Oregon's schools.

Sincerely,

Heather Jefferis Executive Director OCBH