



Oregon Commission on Black Affairs

Advocating for Equity and Diversity throughout Oregon

Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Hudson and Wright, and Members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Liz Fouter-Branch. I am a Commissioner on the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs (OCBA). OCBA serves the people of Oregon to empower and support the African American and Black community through our unique roles as policy advisors to Oregon state policymakers and leaders. OCBA is a catalyst that allows partnerships between the state government and our community in rural and urban areas to ensure success for all African American and Black Oregonians by addressing longstanding and emerging issues at the policy level. I write to you today in support of House Bill 2646.

I am a retired educator whose academic focus is working with students with different learning styles. Some of my students have suffered neglect and abuse beyond developmental, social-emotional, and other behaviors that can impact their learning.

My higher education learnings trained me to look for behaviors like depression, conduct, and attention disorder deficits and how those behaviors can disrupt learning. I fully support HB 2646 because I am trained to provide early intervention services as required by state and federal-mandated laws, rules, and policies for working with students with learning, emotional and behavioral disabilities.

HB 2646 requires the Department of Education (DOE) to provide all employees with basic training on what to look for when our students and their families struggle with mental health issues like depression. Every year, most employees working with the public are required to receive first aid and CPR; I strongly believe mental health training should be required if you are going to work with the public.

The Council for Mental WellBeing has an evidence-based program called Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) that could serve as a template for what HB 2646 requires from the DOE. This training in recognizing mental health issues, learning when and how to de-escalate situations before they happen, and knowing when a referral to a counselor or other wrap-around services would go a long way in making students (and their families) feel seen and heard.

I urge the members of this committee to support the passage of House Bill 2646.

Liz Fouter-Branch

Oregon Commission on Black Affairs

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