



March 16, 2023

TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Our Children Oregon, The Children's Agenda
RE: Support for SB 549, School Health Crisis Response Act

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Webber, and Members of the Committee

Our Children Oregon (OCO) is a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. The Children's Agenda, convened by OCO, brings together ~127 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the well-being of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our collective created a 2023 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families. **This year, the School Health Crisis Response Act (SB 549) is a top priority of the 2023 Children's Agenda.**

Our children and youth are in the midst of a mental health crisis. Young people in Oregon, and nationwide, are struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. Data from 2016 and 2020 indicate children across the nation were more likely to deal with anxiety or depression during the first year of the pandemic (2020) than previously. In Oregon, 11.5% of children between the ages of 3 to 17 reported having anxiety or depression in 2016. In 2020, that jumped to 16.1% – 1 in 6 young people. That's an increase of 40% over 4 years, meaning **nearly 34,000 more Oregon children are experiencing anxiety or depression in the first year of the pandemic.**¹ For 11th graders, 43% reported having depressive symptoms in 2020.² No doubt the pandemic was hard on us all, but it was tremendously challenging on Oregon's youth.

We must ensure every child has access to the mental health care they need, when and where they need it. Oregon School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) are helping to meet that need by providing health services where kids are, at school. In the 2021-2022 school year, 44% of SBHCs visits were for behavioral health reasons. A study conducted in Oregon found that youth at SBHCs were:

- 12% less likely to report a depressive episode
- 16% less likely to report suicidal ideation
- 18% less likely to report a suicide attempt³

¹ <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/2022-kids-count-national-report-and-oregon-state-data-cards-release/>

² <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BIRTHDEATHCERTIFICATES/SURVEYS/Pages/SHS-2020-Results.aspx>

³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29132951/>

SBHCs are not the only solution to address Oregon’s youth mental health crisis, but they provide affordable and accessible care for everyone. They are an important tool helping to strengthen the connection between health care and education– improving student health and educational success in urban, rural, and frontier counties. That’s why we strongly support SB 549. The bill asks for:

- ~\$6 million in flexible funding for school-based community service hubs. These hubs will create opportunities for community engagement and collaboration between schools, students, parents, and community partners to implement trauma-informed school or community school models.
- \$950,000 to provide grants for local communities to implement a school-based health center, school nurse model, or mental health model, according to their priority needs.
- \$570,000 for an inflationary increase of 10% to the SBCHs base rate, which has remained static for over a decade.
- \$6.75 million increase to the School-Based Mental Health Fund to provide additional mental health support in schools either directly or through SBHCs.
- Expand options for using the funding to accommodate workforce shortages and increase youth access to culturally relevant services and supportive adults from diverse backgrounds.

Mental health is just as important as physical health in a child’s ability to thrive. As our state continues to navigate the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must do more to ensure all kids have access to the care and support they need to cope and live full lives. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve the well-being of children and youth across the state. We urge your support of SB 549 to pass the School Health Crisis Response Act.

Sincerely,

Our Children Oregon
Oregon School-Based Health Alliance
Catholic Community Services
Clackamas Women’s Services
Community Action Team, Inc.
Everytown for Gun Safety
Families First Parent Resource Center
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
Friends of Outdoor School
FACT Oregon
IRCO
Neighborhood Partnerships
Oregon AG’s Sexual Assault Task Force
Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries

Oregon CASA Network
Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials
Oregon Food Bank
Oregon Kids Read
Oregon Nurse Association
Oregon PTA
Oregon Primary Care Association
Oregon Resource Family Alliance
Oregon Student Voice
Prevent Child Abuse Oregon
Reach Out and Read Northwest
Southern Oregon Success
Urban League of Portland
Washington County Kids