



Re: Opposition to SB 823, unintended consequences outweigh benefits to youth and families

Dear Chair Gelser Blouin and committee members,

We write to you today as a coalition of programs and professionals who are committed to bring joy and healing to young people suffering from anxiety, depression and other mental health and substance use issues. Our combined mission is to bring rates of anxiety, depression and suicide to all-time lows and our actions driven by a desire to bring joy and healing to students and families. Our mental health programs provide some of the best healing outcomes for adolescents and young adults in the State of Oregon.

In the last two years, we have experienced the passing of Senate bills disrupting our programs and services. While the intent is to help children and families, the legislation has created barriers to children and families in accessing mental health services. Therefore, we will continue our efforts to be either involved in workgroups prior to drafting any related legislation or to put a stop to legislation all together that will cause continuous harm to those youth and families in need.

We oppose SB 823 because it does not represent the best interest of youth and families in need. As introduced the bill seems simple and straightforward in nature. However, we believe the bill would lead to less willing staff to provide the services and less willing students to report abuse. This would ultimately result in less services and less beds available for youth in Oregon. In a [recent article from OPB](#), Dr. Ajit Jetmalani, director of the division of child and adolescent psychiatry at OHSU estimates that Oregon already has a deficit of approximately 100 residential beds for youth.

Our services to thousands of families have resulted in positive outcomes and have prepared students for success as they move into adulthood. As part of this commitment, we continue our effort to lower the stigma of accessing mental health services, to raise the bar of treatment practices while creating more accessibility, and to continue partnering with legislators to end abusive practices and help heal those students that have been subject to abuse.

Thank you for your consideration. Please consider our organizations' resources as you work to address the mental health needs of youth in Oregon.

Regards,

Andrew Scott, Executive Director, Deschutes Wilderness Therapy

Deveney Marshall, Executive Director Embark Behavioral Health

Janice Cummings, Admissions Director Academy at Sisters

Michelle Hall, Executive Director Dragonfly Transitions