

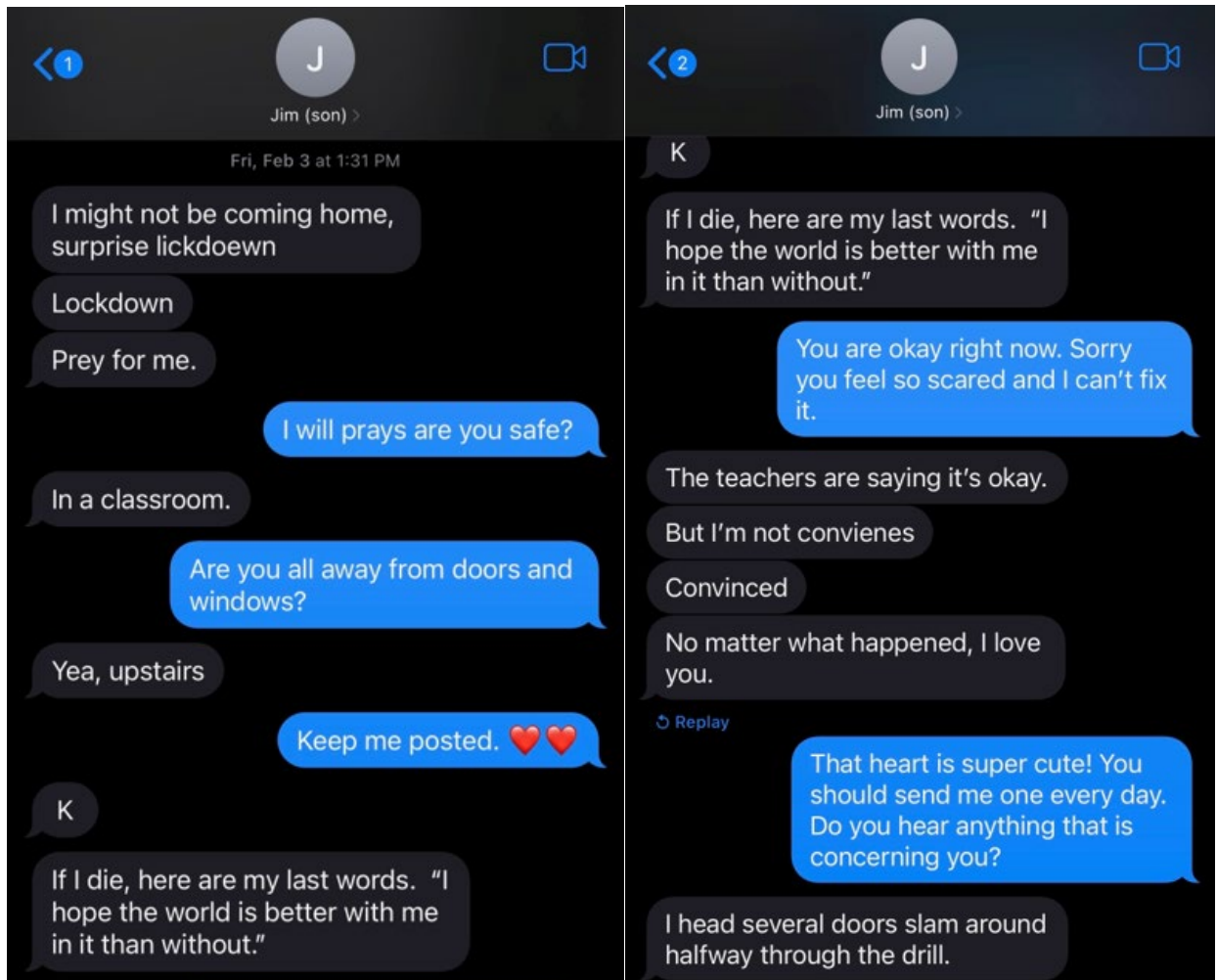
April 17, 2023

Senate Committee on Education
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

I write in strong support of HB 3584. In early February, my son (a 7th-grader) was involved in a lockdown at his middle school. While lockdowns are increasingly common in our public schools, the quick nature of this lockdown made it clear that it was not a drill, and the words used to initiate it suggested that it was caused by an unauthorized person gaining access to the school.

My son was visibly shaken when I picked him up. He didn't know the cause of the lockdown, but said that the rumor was that high-schoolers had gained access to the school with unknown motives. While I knew he was scared, it wasn't until we talked as a family that evening that I realized how profoundly terrified he was during the event. These are the text messages he sent my wife during the lockdown:



Reading those text messages that evening made my stomach sink. As a parent, there is nothing worse than knowing your child is terrified, but not having the tools needed to ease their fear. I emailed the Principal asking if the school would be sending a message to families letting them know what happened, and how it was resolved. My hope was to be able to tell my son that the lockdown was caused by some benign event, and that he was not in harm's way, and didn't need to worry that the situation would be repeated the following week.

Unfortunately, my email was ignored, and no communication regarding the lockdown was ever distributed to families. I later learned through records associated with the lockdown that other students were scared as well, with one rumor involving an armed intruder coming to the school to target a specific student, and another student calling the SafeOregon tipline to express their concern that the lockdown was caused by violent intruders.

Clear, swift, and accurate information would have helped the entire community process events in a healthy way, and would have helped stem the dissemination of misinformation in the school community. Lockdowns are critically important safety procedures, but without knowing the circumstances that cause them, there is no way to help set our children's minds at ease. My pre-teen son thought his story might end that day, at the hands of an outside intruder, in a second story middle school classroom. There was nothing I could say to make it better.

HB 3584 provides an opportunity to adopt systematic *communication* procedures after these events occur, requiring that basic information be shared with families within 24 hours of a safety procedure. This simple requirement would go a long way to equip parents and families with the knowledge and information they need to help their children process frightening events as best as possible. Passing HB 3584 ensures that student mental health is prioritized along with their physical safety.

Putting these basic procedures in place at the state level provides an important consistency in the requirement to communicate with families. Notably, the bill leaves the actual implementation very open at the district and school level, so that individual districts and schools can communicate the basic required information in the formats and pathways that work best for their students and families.

The event that caused the lockdown at my son's school was probably much ado about nothing. Fortunately, most lockdowns are. I'd have done anything to be able to tell my son that shortly after the event, so that he could go back to worrying about more typical 12-year-old things, and not the threats of harm and violence that increasingly loom in our children's minds. HB 3584 ensures that families are able to do just that, and I urge you to support the legislation.

Sincerely,

Eric Chambers
Portland