



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

May 10, 2023

Dear Chair Reynolds 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, the legislation has created barriers for 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.

While the intent of SB 823A is to improve regulations on services provided to youth, we are concerned the legislation creates a greater risk to children and families accessing mental health services. The bill does little to meet the increasing demand of high-quality mental health services for youth.

Our programs oppose SB 823A and the -A5 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 opening sensitive information involving youth to public records law should not be done lightly. We oppose this bill because:

- The bill is not a product of a larger stakeholder group. A bill of this significance should be the product of a broad stakeholder group that includes parents, students, programs, state agencies, the Attorney General, and other public record advocates. Once something is subject to public records law, if unintended consequences arise, it is challenging to come back to the legislature to restore the exemption.
- 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.
- The -A5 further exposes students and staff. Under certain circumstances, it would prohibit redaction of an individual's information and allow the rerelease of the report.

Our programs and advocacy focus on creating joy for kids and families and healing across generations. We prepare students for success as they move into adulthood. We strive to reduce the stigma and increase access to mental health care.

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 thinking through the possible unintended consequences of this bill. Please do not pass a bill that could negatively impact, or disrupt, existing critical services to youth and families 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