

Dear Co-Chairs Sanchez and Steiner and members of the Ways and Means Committee

My name is Rachel O'Rourke, I am a member of AFSCME Local 88 which represents the employees of the Multnomah County Health Department where I am a co-lead steward as well as an acute care coordinator with the Multnomah County Crisis Line.

I appreciate the investments and other work over the last few years to improve Oregon's Behavioral and Mental Health Services. Oregon AFSCME is supportive of the continued investments and dedicated funding called out in the Governor's Recommended Budget and would like to call attention to a few vital funding needs that could save lives.

The governor has requested funding for suicide prevention and intervention services. The request for \$7.7 million General Fund would provide the vital funding needed to expand the child and adult suicide prevention, intervention and postvention program to reduce suicide in Oregon.

I have worked as a Mental Health Consultant with the Multnomah County Health Department in the school based mental health program for 10 years and with the Multnomah County Crisis line for the past two years. I have seen first hand the grief and trauma individuals, families and communities experience in the aftermath of a suicide. I have seen what happens to a school when a child dies by suicide. The loss of a 12 year-old who dies by suicide is a loss that causes lifelong trauma for the child's family, the child's friends and the child's community. A child's death by suicide also can lead to more deaths of children by suicide without postvention mental health services. Deaths by suicide are preventable and what we need more than ever is funding to increase mental health support, train community members in suicide intervention, postvention and expand community based suicide intervention education for youth and adults. These are all life saving measures that are chronically underfunded.

One way to prevent suicide among children and youth is to expand mental health services and provide early mental health intervention. We have the ability to assess children and youth to detect risk of suicide and to provide life saving mental health services to children, youth and their families. We need funding for these life saving measures. The governor has recognized the need for expanded children and youth services and has requested \$11.5 million General Fund to support the expansion of behavioral rehabilitation services to all Medicaid clients who need it, to support the expansion of service hubs for transition aged-youth, and for

targeted investments in the workforce for additional child psychiatrists and developmental pediatricians.

I know the needs are extensive and that as the session continues, you will receive policy bills that are important bills for continuing the work of behavioral health systems transformation. We ask you to commit to joining us in the effort to prevent death by suicide. Help us make sure that our children and youth live healthy and long lives.