

February 3, 2025

TO: House Committee on Education

FROM: Ali King, Policy and Advocacy Director, Our Children Oregon

Re: Support HB 2729

Dear Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2729. My name is Ali King and I am the Policy and Advocacy Director for Our Children Oregon (OCO), a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. **This year, HB 2729, School-Based Health Services, is a top priority of the Our Children Oregon's 2025 Children's Agenda.**

I have been actively involved with Oregon's youth throughout my career and during the past 25 years as a parent and volunteer. Due to the impacts of COVID, the existential threat of school shootings, the relentless barrage of social media, and the nation's political tension and divisiveness, **children and youth are in an unprecedented mental health crisis, particularly in Oregon.** In fact, Oregon is ranked last in the U.S. for youth mental health and Oregon Student Health Survey Data (2022) revealed that 38% of 11th grade students are suffering from depressive symptoms.

A few years ago, when my daughter was in high school, her close friend revealed to her that he was having serious thoughts of suicide. She urged him to talk with someone about it, but he told her that his parents struggled financially and he didn't want to ask them to pay for a therapist. When my daughter confided in me that this conversation happened, I reached out to his parents and helped them find some resources for him. Had he not told my daughter what he was going through, this story might have had a tragic ending. Access to mental health services in school will address issues like this by removing barriers for students and allowing them to access care when needed.

HB 2729 will address a critical need in our state by providing immediate support to Oregon's youth and families. Early mental health investment in youth is a protective factor against substance use, serious mental illness, and other behavioral health issues.

I appreciate your time and commitment to improving the lives of young Oregonians. I urge you to support the School-Based Health Services Act and vote yes on HB 2729.

Thank you,

*Ali King*

Ali King

Policy and Advocacy Director, Our Children Oregon

View the [2025 Children's Agenda](#)