

January 31, 2025

TO: House Committee on Education

FROM: Our Children Oregon, Children's Agenda

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 House Bill 2729. I am an intern for Our Children Oregon (OCO), a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. The Children's Agenda, convened by OCO, brings together more than 135 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the wellbeing of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our coalition created a 2025 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families. **This year, The School-Based Health Services Act (HB 2729) is a top priority of the 2025 Children's Agenda.**

Oregon children and youth are in an unprecedented mental health crisis. Oregon Youth mental health is ranked last in the U.S. Oregon also ranks 4th highest chronic absenteeism in the United States. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2024 National Data Book states, "Early research indicates that the pandemic both exacerbated existing attendance challenges and introduced new ones: rising anxiety and other mental health issues."

A study conducted in Oregon by Mallie J Paschall and Melina Bersamin ("School-Based Health Centers, Depression, and Suicide Risk Among Adolescents" 2018) found that youth at school-based health centers with increased mental health capacity were:

- 12% less likely to report a depressive episode
- 16% less likely to report suicidal ideation
- 18% less likely to report a suicide attempt

School-based health services are an effective way of meeting students where they are while they are at school. SBHSs positively contribute to students' health and educational outcomes. Barriers are removed for students to access care who may otherwise not be able to. This bill supports Oregon youth from around the state. For these and many other reasons, we strongly support HB 2729, which will:

- Provide behavioral health grants to Oregon school communities, without pulling from the State School Fund. (\$7.85mil)
- Five planning grants to develop new school-based health center and school nurse models to support thousands of students, without drawing from the State School Fund. (\$600,000)
- Inflationary increases to school-based health center operating grants, which have remained static for over a decade. (\$900,000)

The School-Based Health Services Act addresses the critical needs to help Oregon youth, which we need now more than ever. Our Children Oregon strongly believes in ensuring every Oregon child has a chance to thrive. We thank you for your time and commitment to improving the lives of young Oregonians. We urge you to support the School-Based Health Services Act and vote yes on HB 2729.

Thank you,

Chloe Acosta, Policy and Advocacy Intern, Our Children Oregon

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