

Testimony HB 2729

School-based health centers

Chair Neron and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon PTA, I'm writing in support of HB 2729, which provides critical resources that youth and families across Oregon need now.

We support the planning grant opportunities for the expansion of school-based health centers (SBHCs) and the inflationary increase to provide greater financial stability to SBHCs.

SBHCs are a vital community tool that supports young people's health and well-being by providing medical care, behavioral health services and, often, dental services on school grounds, and regardless of ability to pay. SBHCs reduce barriers such as cost and transportation and in "Areas of Unmet Health Care Needs"¹ might be one of very few providers available to students at all.

We also want to underline the important role that SBHCs play in addressing our crisis of chronic absenteeism as SBHCs are located on school grounds and are open and operating when youth are in school. As a result, students are back in class faster than if they had sought health care in a non-SBHC setting. Additionally, parents do not need to take time off work in order to transport their child to the doctor.

We also support the additional investments in school-based mental health services included in HB 2729.

Our children's mental health is suffering, unsurprising given the aftermath of a global pandemic, the impact of social media, and too many verbal and physical attacks on our children based on the color of their skin, the place of their birth, gender, sexuality or simply for who they are.

According to the latest Oregon's Student Health Survey², over 48% of eleven graders describe their current emotional and mental health as poor (18.4%) or fair (29.7%) at best (Table 2). Even more shocking, about 1,200 sixth graders (7.2%) seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year and almost 1 out of 7 eleventh graders (over 1,800 children) did so too (Table 60).

Our youth need this now and these resources will allow for an immediate increase in our capacity to support them. I urge you to vote yes on HB 2729.

Thank you,

Robin Roemer, VP for Legislation Oregon PTA

¹ <https://www.ohsu.edu/oregon-office-of-rural-health/maps>

²

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BIRTHDEATHCERTIFICATES/SURVEYS/Documents/SHS/2022/Reports/State%20of%20Oregon%202022.pdf>