

“Chair Neron and Members of the Committee:

My name is Emely, and I am a student. I’m writing in support of HB 2729, which provides critical resources that youth and families across Oregon need now. Oregon is ranked 49th in the nation for youth mental health, and it’s showing in our schools through rampant behavior issues and high rates of chronic absenteeism. HB 2729 provides evidence-based resources that will be quickly available for schools to support youth mental and physical health. A study conducted in Oregon found that youth are 10-21x more likely to seek mental health support at a school-based health center (SBHC) and that SBHCs that increased mental health capacity were 12% less likely to report a depressive episode; 16% less likely to report suicidal ideation; and 18% less likely to report a suicide attempt.

As a student and a young person of this generation, I have personally experienced depression. There were times when I felt lost, isolated, and helpless, not knowing where to seek help. I strongly support HB 2729 because access to a safe space and mental health resources in schools would have made a significant impact on my life during those difficult times. Furthermore, students spend a large portion of their day in school, making it a critical place for students to have accessible mental health support. Having a health center within the school system would benefit not only students like me who have struggled with depression but also students who have had suicidal thoughts and felt helpless and confused about how to access help. Having this system will also help lower chronic absences. When students know they have a safe and supportive environment, then students will be more likely to attend school and seek the necessary help. HB 2729 is an essential step toward ensuring that future generations have the mental health resources and support system that many did not experience. By passing this bill, you will be offering students a second chance who currently are affected by depression.

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,
Emely