

Good afternoon Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the committee.

My name is Catalina Salinas and I am a supporter of Senate Bill 527. As a current PhD student in the Health Systems and Management Program through the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and Portland State University School of Public Health, I am excited for the consideration of investing \$3.5 Million dollars to create a behavioral health workforce pipeline intentionally for high school students to access and receive the education, training, and encouragement needed for them to pursue a career in behavioral health.

An OHSU news article states, “Oregon ranks as one of the worst states for youth who are struggling with mental illness” (Bacon, 2024). Oregon currently does not have enough mental health professionals to serve the mental health needs of Oregonians. The strategy of Senate Bill 527 addresses the mental health crisis being experienced among Oregon’s youth *and* the behavioral health workforce shortage crisis in Oregon.

Importantly, the strategy of Senate Bill 527 improves access to important behavioral health knowledge and effective practices to help high school students better manage their emotions and mental health, as well as improve their capacity to connect peers to effective mental health resources. Additionally, the Oregon Legislature should support Senate Bill 527 because increasing the access to mental health training and behavioral health career opportunities for youth can strengthen Oregon’s capacity to meet the needs of youth both emotionally through behavioral health support and potentially financially through professional development and healthcare career opportunities.

Senate Bill 527 is important because the expected short term outcomes would be a grant program that funds behavioral health workforce development for high school students. The intermediate outcomes would be more students equipped with the behavioral health knowledge and coping strategies needed to manage their mental and emotional wellbeing. Long term outcomes of the policy would include an increase in culturally representative and competent behavioral health professionals qualified to serve and better meet Oregonians’ needs for mental health care and treatment.

Senate Bill 527 provides hope that youth mental health can improve *and* lives can be saved when they are equipped with the tools, strategies, and encouragement to better manage their mental health in healthier ways. Please vote “Yes” for Senate Bill 527.

Thank you,

Catalina Salinas

Reference:

1. Bacon, W. (2024, May 24). The Kids Are Not Alright: How OHSU is addressing the youth mental health crisis. *Oregon Health and Science University*. <https://ohsufoundation.org/stories/the-kids-are-not-alright-how-ohsu-is-addressing-the-youth-mental-health-crisis/>.