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TO: Co-Chairs Nathanson and Bates
Joint Committee on Ways and Means – Subcommittee on Human Services

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SUBJECT: School Access to Mental Health Services

My name is Karla Bertolini; I am a School-Based Mental Health Therapist in the Coos Bay Schools through Coos Health and Wellness. I currently work with students, families, and staff at two middle schools, the high school, and an alternative learning center. As a Mental Health Therapist in the schools I provide a variety of services, including counseling and case management services to students in need, crisis intervention, assessment, and triage, and consultation to staff, parents, and relevant parties. In the past two months since starting my position I have experienced several advantages to working in the schools and how my position benefits students, families, and staff.

- **Availability & Access:** As my position is based in the schools, my services are easily accessible to students, families, and staff. This eliminates the need for transportation to and from appointments and allows for more consistency in services. I also have more availability to meet with students as I am not carrying a large caseload like most mental health providers.
- **Crisis Intervention:** In my work at the high school I have been asked on numerous occasions to meet with students who are presenting with suicidal ideation or self-harm behaviors and who may be experiencing abuse or neglect at home. I am able to assess students for safety and risk of harm, can help them develop a safety plan if needed, provide resources and appropriate referrals, and can follow up with students and relevant parties as needed.
- **Counseling Services:** My position is very unique in that I am able to offer counseling services to students who are uninsured or are unable to afford services due to their insurance coverage. Many of my students have needed counseling services for quite some time and are now able to receive this service on a regular basis without worrying about the cost or limiting their

number of sessions.

- **Home Environments:** Many of the students I work with come from very difficult home and living environments. This includes parents or guardians who are struggling to make ends meet, families that are living in substandard home environments, parents or guardians who are struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues, and the list goes on and on. In my position I am able to provide a safe place for students to process these situations and how it is impacting their lives, schooling, and well-being.
- **Bullying:** As we know bullying has become a significant and serious problem in many school settings across the nation. In my role I am able to provide support to students who are being bullied, help address and offer suggestions to staff and parents, and help students understand how their words and actions can negatively or positively impact those around them.
- **Consultation:** A major part of my role as a Mental Health Therapist in the schools is to provide consultation to students, families, teachers, guidance counselors, nurses, administrators, and administrative staff. In the past two months I have been asked to reach out to parents and guardians who are concerned about their children for various mental health and safety issues. I have met with families who are concerned about the risk of self-harming behaviors and suicidal ideation and am able to provide support and resources. I have also met with various school staff to discuss their concerns and help them make appropriate referrals.
- **Resources:** Another benefit of my position is to be able to offer helpful resources to students, families, and staff. I am able to help refer students to additional mental health services if needed, including skills training, psychiatric services, and medication management and can help to expedite this process if needed. I can also help refer them to local community agencies for financial assistance, housing assistance, homeless services, food banks, support groups, parenting classes, etc.

During the past two months my schools have expressed great appreciation for these additional services which enable them to create an educational environment that supports all aspects of their student's lives and overall well-being. They are looking forward to these services continuing in the future.