



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Chair Doherty, Vice-Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chair Helt, members of the committee:

Last February, two students in my district attempted to commit suicide during the school day at Rowe Middle School.ⁱ The tragic reality is that suicide is not just a House District 41 issue, but rather an urgent matter affecting every county in Oregon. The Oregon Health Authority reports that suicide is the second-leading cause of death among people 5-24 years old in our state.ⁱⁱ Nationally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that the suicide rate among children 10 to 14 years old doubled from 2007 to 2014.ⁱⁱⁱ As we know, the children of Oregon are the future of our state, and their success is vital to our state's prosperity. However, we are failing to properly support our students and to provide them with safe, healthy learning environments.

As a legislative body, we have the opportunity with SB 52 to help destigmatize the mental health and socio-economic challenges students experience by giving schools the resources they need to offer proper support. Life is hard enough for youth who are growing into themselves and learning about themselves. When we add the particular difficulties Oregon faces in unmet mental health and housing needs, children should have access to support systems at schools, the place where they spend the majority of their day.

SB 52 recognizes high-risk groups, including LGBTQ+ youth, those with mental illness, and students with disabilities. Another high-risk group is homeless youth or youth in unstable housing situations, which is of particular concern in my district. In 2017, a Clackamas County report found that there are 1,165 homeless children in the county.^{iv} Also according to Clackamas County, "Counts are much higher in number of unsheltered individuals (up 54%), homeless children (up 35%), and chronically homeless individuals (up 43%)".^v Instability in housing puts an incredible strain on families, can cause poor performance in school, and can be a source of bullying. Like many of the bills we will hear this session, homelessness is a multi-faceted issue that cannot be ignored and must be tackled from a variety of fronts including through the efforts of SB 52.

We owe it to our students to provide them with school environments where they can thrive, and to provide schools with the necessary tools to properly address the issue of youth suicide. I know for many people, the Capitol feels far away, but I hope this legislation sends a message to each kid in Oregon that your legislators care about you and want the best for you.

Thank you, members of the committee, for hearing this bill.

State Representative Karin Power

ⁱ KATU2, "After two middle school students attempt suicide, prevention group talks warning signs," <https://katu.com/news/local/after-two-middle-school-students-attempt-suicide-prevention-group-talks-warning-signs>

ⁱⁱ Oregon Health Authority, <https://www.oregon.gov/OHA/PH/BIRTHDEATHCERTIFICATES/VITALSTATISTICS/ANNUALREPORTS/VOLUME2/Documents/2016/Table604.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Quickstats: Death Rates for Motor Vehicle Traffic Injury, Suicide, and Homicide Among Children and Adolescents aged 10-14 Years -United States, 1999-2014," https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6543a8.htm?s_cid=mm6543a8_w#suggestedcitation.

^{iv} <https://dochub.clackamas.us/documents/drupal/837498e9-d00e-43ba-8e54-accf4472b08e>;

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