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The Importance of School Based Health Centers for Multnomah County
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Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance of School Based Health Centers. My name is Cathy Kaufmann and I am the Policy Director for Children First for Oregon. Children First is a widely respected nonprofit, nonpartisan child advocacy organization that has been speaking up on behalf of Oregon's children for 15 years. We believe every child in this state has a right to health, safety and security. We

Growing up healthy, both physically and mentally, is essential for a child's success. Health needs that go unmet significantly impact a child's well-being and reduce her or his ability to learn and grow into a productive adult. Success in school and good health are inextricably linked. Access to affordable, quality and comprehensive health care is not only vital to a child's health and well-being, it is an essential component of every family's financial stability.

Health insurance coverage alone does not guarantee a child's health needs will be met. As our current county data book "An issue of Fairness: Reducing Health Disparities" shows, many families struggle to access health care for the children for reasons beyond health insurance status. Structural barriers because of income, culture and race or ethnicity significantly impact families' ability to access care.

For years, Children First has recommended the expansion of health services in schools as one of the most effective ways to improve children's timely access to needed medical, dental and mental health care, as well as promote student's overall physical and emotional well-being so they can succeed in school.

School-based health centers deliver quality, affordable, cost-effective health care and enjoy broad community support. They are an investment that returns benefits to our schools, families, communities, and most of all to our youth. SBHCs work in collaborative relationships with local education and health care communities, leveraging resources to benefit kids. SBHCs are part of Oregon's system of safety net clinics. The convenience of SBHCs gets students back in class faster and keeps parents from missing work.

School districts normally rely on school nurses to be their health services experts. School nurses provide and supervise direct health care services to students and facilitate access to health care in the community. Unfortunately, one nurse is often expected to serve thousands of students because many school districts have eliminated or reduced the availability of school nurses because of budget constraints. School nurses are not mandated in Oregon. The state allows non-medical school personnel to dispense medication and provide treatment to students when a nurse is not available.

School-based health centers support the work of school nurses and guarantee immediate access to primary care. The proposed cuts will mean that 2,500 fewer students will have access to these cost-effective primary care clinics that provide developmentally appropriate care in convenient, consumer-friendly settings. Last school year, 1,520 kids received care in the last school year in the five centers proposed to be cut. These kids made a total of 5,486 visits. Well over half of these children are uninsured and more than half are also racial/ethnic minorities. Surveys have shown that 60 percent of students who access school-based health centers would not have received care if it had not been for the center in their school.

I urge you to make sure all of Multnomah County's school based health centers stay open as the service they provide is invaluable to children and our community.