



A Brief History of YES tipline

A personal account by Kirk Williamson

- Summer 2018: State Senator Sharon Brown (R-8) is approached by LGBTQ+ activist Connor Mertens, a graduate of Southridge High School in Kennewick about starting a tip line like Michigan's OK2SAY.
- August 2018: Senator Brown (R-8), asked County Commissioner Jerome Delvin, County Human Services Director Kyle Sullivan, and me for support. Kyle and I called Mary Drew, who heads Michigan's OK2SAY. To say she was eager to help would be to vastly understate the case.
- The Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition endorsed the need for a confidential tip line in Washington.
- November 2018: a Community Safety Summit attended by 40 of our community's heavy hitters in law enforcement, education, health district, and youth-facing community organizations. Mary and her colleagues from OK2SAY made a presentation via Skype, followed by a discussion of youth suicide and a SWOT analysis led by the Health District's Carla Prock. The outcome is documented in a [White Paper](#) released in December 2018.
- January 2019: Senator Brown introduced a bill giving the Attorney General \$200,000 to support the Washington Youth Safety and Wellbeing Work Group. I was appointed to that 14-member group, which released its [recommendations](#) to the Legislature in July 2020.
- Meantime, Gloria (spouse) and I attended the Tip Line Summit in Reno and brought back great contacts and information, including an invitation to attend the monthly national conference calls. I ran that by the AG staffer, Joyce Bruce, who also attended the Reno conference and she agreed that it was a good idea.
- January 2021: Senator Brown introduced SB5327 which passed the Senate 48-0. It was hung up in the House when the chair of the House Committee on Children, Youth, and Families opposed it out of concern that the tip line would be used by to "swat" youth of color. She substituted a striking amendment that would have created yet another study with a limited pilot in up to 10 School Districts, ALL in Eastern Washington, with the money going to the Department of Health. The striking amendment did not pass the House.
- Senator Brown and I thought the whole thing was dead for another year at that point in early April. In conference, the Senate budget writer restored Sen. Brown's original language with the AG's funding package in the biennial budget, which passed both chambers.
- Washington's governor has a line-item veto, and we were worried that he might veto the funding. The state PTA lobbied the governor, but nobody knew for certain what he would do until he signed the budget on May 25. No veto
- July 1, 2021: The biennial budget goes into effect and the \$2.4 million is available to the AG's office. The AGO is advertising for staff and preparing to begin the process of putting YES (Youth Empowered to Speak-up) into service.

Kirk Williamson is program manager of the Benton-Franklin Community Health Alliance, a local non-profit serving as a "neutral convener" for organizations interested in community health.