

Nicky Zimmerman, RN, MSN
Testimony in Support of SB 698
President of Oregon School Nurses Association

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 698 on behalf of the Oregon Student Nurses Association. The Oregon School Nurses Association is a non-profit association dedicated to supporting and creating continued educational opportunities for school nurses, and is affiliated with the National Association of School Nurses.

As school nurses, we are responsible for keeping students healthy and helping to improve student academic performance. There is a great deal of anecdotal information to demonstrate the effectiveness of school nurses. Empirically however, we have a lot of facts, statistics and information missing, for a number of reasons.

First, there is a lack of school nurses. The statistics we do have say Oregon ranks 47th in school nurse to student ratio. We are truly too busy doing our jobs to even start proving our worth. Secondly, school nursing is so diverse across the State, with some nurses work through the Education Service Districts, some in individual school districts, and others through the county health departments. The role of school nurses varies so much that is difficult to determine an exact number of school nurses we do have, with no structure to collect and look at any of the data of the impact we know school nurses make. There is also an “unspoken” issue of the education world not really knowing or understanding a lot about the health care and issues we deal with, and the health care world not really knowledgeable or understanding about the “education” house we work in. This bill would address all of this by creating a task force to recommend a form and structure to collect “hard” data, creating a bridge between the world of health and education, and look at ways to fund school nursing services outside of the Department of Education’s budget.

This article in the Sunday Oregonian on February 15th by Steve Duin discussed one of my schools, Roosevelt High School, and brought up the fact that Roosevelt has a 53% 4 year graduation rate, and how we are trying to improve things. What it didn’t say is that graduation rate is up from about 40% four years ago. I am proud to say that I am part of “Roosevelt on the Rise”, and I am proud to know that a part of that graduation rate increase is from my work at that school—the most culturally diverse, poorest socio-economic, highest teen pregnancy rate High School in the State of Oregon.

I know, increasing the number of school nurses throughout the state will make a difference in the lives of Oregon's students. It does take a village to bring students to their potential, and school nursing is part of that village. We see the whole student, not just the academics that teachers look at, and not just their health that providers look at.

Recently, I was helping a student who jammed his finger playing basketball in the gym. He was looking at the pictures of my two boys and smiled at me and said "they are Mama's boys, aren't they?" And I asked him what he meant? He said, "look at these pictures, you have one from every year of their life, you can tell they have never wanted for nothing, and have everything. My Mom doesn't even see me for days, hasn't gotten me anything for my birthday or Christmas for years, and doesn't even have a picture of me anywhere." It brought me to tears. It is not always easy to educate children in the best of circumstances, and almost impossible in the worst. While a medical provider will diagnose, treat and give students whatever medicine they need, they are not with them daily to manage whatever their medical condition is.

SB 698 will help us start to get organized and provide our students care in the most effective way. For the students of Oregon, on behalf of the school nurses of Oregon, and for the teachers and families of Oregon, I thank you for your consideration of this bill, and would be happy to answer any questions you might have.