

To: Senate Committee on Health Care

Date: March 18, 2015

Re: SB 698

Chair Anderson, members of the committee:

For the record my name is Michele Catena. I am a Physical Therapist (PT) working with Portland Public Schools (PPS). I serve students from kindergarten to age 21 that have gross motor delays and/or physical disabilities that impede their ability to access their educational environment and curriculum. Many of the students I serve are medically fragile, having many disabilities and requiring complex medical care and assistance throughout the school day. As a PT at PPS I am a union member of the Portland Federation of School Professionals Local 111 of American Federation of Teachers (AFT). I also serve as a Vice President on the Executive Board of Local 111. I would like to provide my support in favor of SB 698 based on my experience and knowledge as a medical professional working in a school-based setting.

I am unable to provide my testimony in support of SB 698 in person and hope that you will consider this letter with much merit and zeal, in my absence.

In many of the elementary schools that I serve there is only a school nurse on site 1-2 days/week. This leaves the day to day management of medical protocols, student health and well being, and any emergent situations that arise in the hands of the school staff. Particularly our school secretaries and paraeducators have bore the brunt of this understaffing, and they are not trained as medical professionals. These hard-working and caring employees are asked to perform medical procedures on a daily basis, often with little to no training.

Many of the students I serve suffer from chronic seizures requiring specific medication protocols to be in place. These protocols, while written and managed by nurses, are carried out on a daily basis my paraeducators and school staff (for example secretaries). The duties they are performing can often be life saving in the event of severe seizures- a significant burden for a non-medical professional. There are also instances where school secretaries are administering blood glucose testing and insulin injections. (This is something that even I am not authorized to do as a licensed medical professional with a doctorate in my field.)

The creation of a State School Nursing Consultant within the Oregon Health Authority is a step in the right direction. Medical professionals in a school based setting, such as myself and my nursing colleagues, have a specific and unique role. Often the state board of our professional licensure and practice acts, do not understand this role. It would benefit our students and our community to have a better understanding of the importance of nurses in our schools. The establishment of the task force will also allow for better understanding of the potential issues in different settings such as rural and urban districts. For the safety of our students, it's essential that lawmakers take a critical look at other funding sources, including other healthcare funding like billing students' insurance, to provide the resources to bring nurses back into our schools. To that end, I would like to add my support to Amendment 1.

I encourage the Chairperson and members of this committee to carefully consider the safety of not only our most vulnerable, medically fragile students, but also the well-being of the student athletes and student participating in physical education (PE). In the absence of a school nurse on campus, leaves all our students vulnerable. When an accidental collision or fall occurs in PE, there is then no one qualified to assess the students. As an example, two students collided on scooters in a PE class where I was assisting a student, and both were holding their heads. I took them to the office, but there was not a school nurse present to advise on concussion monitoring or to examine the students. The

secretary graciously offered the students ice and they were sent back into PE. The teacher and staff should have been given some signs and symptoms to monitor for the rest of the school day to rule out a concussion (also referred to as a mild traumatic brain injury).

I appreciate the Chairperson's and committee members' time and attention to this important matter. I would be happy to provide any clarification or answer any questions to further support SB 698. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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