

3-22-17

House Committee on Health Care
Regarding HB 2408

Chair Greenlick, Vice Chair Nosse, Vice Chair Hayden and all members of the House Committee on Education:

I am writing in strong opposition to HB 2408. My reasons are shared below. I do, however strongly support HB 2174 which appropriates money to have ODE hire and place social workers in public schools. We have staggering amount of unaddressed mental health needs in the schools. HB2408 is not an effective and fiscally prudent way to meet these needs.

Now is not the appropriate time to be spending valuable tax payer money on the expansion of school based health centers when districts will likely be laying off school staff. Beaverton will be laying off social worker(s) if the budget cuts go through. Tigard has already reduced mental health staff and schools now have one position- a counselor/psych. Staff reduction often disproportionately affect non direct teaching staff and will negatively impact the provision of mental health care directly in the schools.

Section 2 of HB 2408 appropriates \$3,000,000 to increase student access to school based mental health providers. We absolutely need to increase the number of school counselors and school social workers to meet the mental health needs of students. Having a school counselor is not mandated and is an easy thing to cut with budget shortfall. This is a question of equity and parity. All children in Oregon deserve access to counselors and social workers.

Section 3 of HB 2408. We do not need a pilot program to decrease rates of school absenteeism by using a trauma informed approach. The need is well documented and a pilot program is utterly unnecessary. We must directly provide schools with the needed counselors and social workers in order to meet these needs. We need "boots on the ground"- social workers and counselors who are ready at every moment during the school day to not only keep kids in school but to interact with them throughout the day as needed to meet the unmet mental health needs. We do not need the SBHC and SBHCA to act as "middle man" in this process.

This pilot is intended to hire social workers and house them in SBHC. SBHC staff do not have access to school children. It is against the law for confidential student information to be shared with outside providers. Communication is not bi directional. School children have access to SBHC, but SBHC do not have access to children. Even if sited on school grounds or even in a school building, SBHC are free standing medical homes (much like any pediatric office) and staff cannot come into the school to attend to the needs of students. School staff attend to the needs of Oregon school children.

A social worker who is not a district employee cannot have access to attendance information. It is against the law. How can she be effective in reducing rates of absenteeism if she cannot have access to that information? We cannot discuss any personal information about a given student

with non school district staff. School counselors, social workers and school nurses have access to that information. How can a SBHC social worker work with staff to address absenteeism if she cannot have access to information about an individual student? Often, multiple school staff work together to tease apart the complicated reasons for absenteeism. A social worker hired by a school district will be able to address all student and family needs- not just chronic absenteeism as described by this bill.

School staff all over the state are already becoming versed in trauma informed approaches to education. Teachers have been exposed to this approach through ongoing PBIS training that happens in the schools. Principals were trained this week in Salem. School Nurses had Dr Teri Pettersen from Trauma Informed Oregon who trained us at our last conference. One of the schools that I serve, Aloha Huber Park, had training this week in trauma informed approach to education. According to Trauma Informed Oregon, we already have 29 organizational and individual experts in this field located throughout Oregon. There are already 7 Trauma Informed summits and forums schedule from this week through May in various cities throughout the state. It is a much more prudent use of taxpayer money to make effective use of the experts that we already have in Oregon rather than begin a pilot program, hire and create experts and then house them in SBHC where they will not be effective.

I respectfully request that you give funds to ODE so that we can hire many school counselors and social workers to directly serve our school children. HB 2408 does not do this.

Kim Bartholomew, RN
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