

Oregon House Education Committee
Honorable Representative Margaret Doherty, Chair

Dear Representative Doherty and Esteemed Colleagues:

I am writing with regard to HB 3395, which would allow School Districts throughout our state to hire candidates trained as Social Workers to fill School Counseling roles k-8, with a Child Development Specialist designation. While I am aware of the overlap of some of the skills Social Workers and Professional School Counselors bring to the table, the differences in preparation are wide enough that I would suggest your serious consideration to opposing this bill.

One of the most important distinctions between these groups is the training and expertise in Special Education process and law. In fact, in Salem-Keizer Public Schools, our School Counselors function as coordinators of Student Study Teams, whose role it is to address student challenges and barriers to learning, whether they be academic, social-emotional, cultural, or environmental. This process is designed to reveal deficits that may be addressed by way of classroom or targeted small group instruction or referral to testing for learning disabilities, areas that are rarely practiced in Social Work preparation. In addition, our School Counselors also serve as Section 504 Case Managers, which is designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities who may not qualify under IDEA designation. Clearly, the knowledge necessary to appropriately carry out these services is fundamental to serving students in our schools.

Professional School Counseling training uniquely prepares candidates to examine and deliver Comprehensive School Counseling programs in schools, which are both preventative and systemic in nature. They are experts in designing delivery systems that uniquely address the culture of their specific school, which can vary greatly from site to site. This involves programming to include classroom skill building, school wide approaches, as well as one-on-one and small group instruction in a proactive and strategic manner. It includes Social Emotional Learning (complete with standards and goals), Career and College Planning, Academic advisement, and Community Involvement. By contrast, Social Work is generally a responsive approach that is primarily focused on garnering community resources, a service that School Counselors also provide.

In recognition of the evolution in School Counselor standards and preparation, the Salem-Keizer School District elected a number of years ago to place a moratorium on the hiring of candidates without specific licensure as a School Counselor. We believe that, while the partnership with School Social Workers is an important and complementary one to garner outside supports for our students, the job of Professional School Counselor should be recognized and protected for the unique purpose it serves in our school buildings.

While Social Workers do good work in our school communities, I believe this is simply an effort to allow them to fill roles for which their primary training does not adequately prepare them. As it now stands, they would be eligible to enroll in a School Counseling "licensure only" program in one of our higher

educational institutions to round out their knowledge base, so their options are still available, if they should choose to pursue a Professional School Counseling role.

Thank you for your time and attention, and please help us inform your colleagues as to these important differences between the two roles by recommending a “no” vote on HB 3395.

Sincerely,

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