

Chair Doherty and Members of the House Education Committee,

Good afternoon. I am Gene Eakin - School Counseling Program Lead at Oregon State University. I am here today speaking on behalf of the Oregon School Counselor Association and the Oregon Association of School Counselor Educators and Supervisors.

Let me first state that each of the two organizations I represent, fully support there being as many school social workers in schools as money can afford. I presented testimony at an earlier convening of this committee and indicated that in the most recent report from Mental Health America that Oregon ranks 49th in provision of mental health services to our citizens. That is in the face of ample evidence that the need for mental health services in our state and schools, unfortunately, is well-above the national norms. We need more school social workers doing the good work that they can do and more school counselors doing the good work they can do in order for Oregon schools to increase attendance rates, graduation rates, post high-school education matriculation rates, and improve the behavioral and mental health of our students.

I also hope you agree that legally and ethically, school counselors and school social workers should only be hired to do that work for which they are fully qualified. The American School Counselor Association's Ethical Guidelines state: *School counselors accept employment only for those positions for which they are qualified by education, training, supervised experience and state/national professional credentials.* I read through the Ethical Guidelines of the National Association of School Social Workers and am disappointed to report that I did not find a similar statement in their ethical guidelines.

I know that you have heard testimony from school social workers indicating they believe school social workers are qualified to perform the tasks required of school counselors in grades k-8. I have also shared with you written statements from school counselor program leads in three of the five largest districts in Oregon as well as from school counselor educators and Oregon School Counselor Association leaders who do not share that same professional judgment.

What would I do if I were in your shoes? My answer is, I would not base my vote solely on this testimony. If I were in your position, I would instead vote "no" on House Bill 3395 and then recommend that a Taskforce be convened that would include among others:

1. School Counseling Program Leads: You have already received written testimony from school counseling program leads in Eugene, Salem, and Beaverton. Individuals in these positions not only are responsible for hiring school counselors but then also are responsible for ensuring these new employees adequately perform the duties assigned to them. Each of these professionals provided confirmation that where the "rubber meets the road," the social workers they have hired were not well prepared to perform many of the roles and responsibilities of school counselors.
2. TSPC Deputy Director Trent Danowksi who is responsible for seeing that school counselor educator programs comply with OAR 584-018-0305 in preparing school counselors to demonstrate the professional knowledge, skills, cultural competencies and professional dispositions necessary to promote the academic, career, and personal and social development of all K-12 students.
3. ODE School Counseling Education Specialist Beth Wigham who is responsible for assisting school counselors and school districts in meeting the requirements of OAR 581-022-1510 - Comprehensive School Counseling and Guidance.

4. Portland State University School Social Work Educators
5. School Counselor Educators

If this Taskforce were to discern that the PSU School Social Worker program prepares their graduates to enter the schools and fulfill these OAR requirements, then a 3395 "Look-a-like" could be presented and passed in the short session in 2018.

If the Taskforce were instead to discern that the PSU SSW program did not adequately meet these requirements, then the program could be instructed to modify their program accordingly, seek the support of PSU Administration for their new program, report back to the Taskforce. Representative Greenlick could then present a bill comparable to 3395 in the 2018 short session.

Either option creates a Win-Win for you in that you could then pass this new bill in 2018 knowing a Taskforce had determined school social workers meet the TSPC and ODE requirements as well as the PSU institutional requirements in their preparation to do the work of the school counselor.