

Dear Members of the House Committee on Health Care,

I am writing to you in opposition to HB2408. As a pediatric nurse for over 17 years and pediatric nurse practitioner for 5 years, I believe strongly in primary care and increasing access to healthcare for children. My concern with this bill is that in this tight budget climate we need to focus state funds where they will be most effective to serve the needs of Oregon's most vulnerable children. I am in support of Section 2 of the bill, but sections 1 and 3 are wasteful.

HB2408 increases funding for school-based health centers (SBHC) which do increase access for *some* children, but only those enrolled in the SBHC. There are many children whose health insurance/OHP plan does not allow their care at the SBHC to be reimbursed and further fragments an already fragmented health care system. I have lived in my community for 16 years and my daughter attended our local elementary school where many children had experienced family histories of trauma, moving multiple times and poverty. I volunteered at least one day a week while working full time because few other parents were able to volunteer at the school. Many of those children had behavioral difficulties or struggled in school to learn while managing the stress that their lives entailed. The part-time school counselor worked extremely hard, but if she had been full time, those same vulnerable children could have been better served. To serve all children, increasing the numbers of school counselor/psychologists, school nurses and social workers is needed to attend to the mental health needs of these children. As school district employees they can collaborate with other school staff to create an individualized environment where each student can thrive. A provider placed in a SBHC does not have access to the educational information from teachers, school nurses, disciplinary staff, etc. in order to do something like this.

Schools are facing significant funding challenges and may need to lay off staff, which is often non-teaching staff. I am very concerned that much needed funds for the Oregon Department of Education will be used toward SBHC which have limited impact instead of addressing the needs of all students. Mental health resources such as school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers can work with all children, those with ongoing needs and those with situational needs. They also serve as resources for teachers, principals and administrative staff in interacting with children in therapeutic ways – HB2408 proposes that a social worker housed in the SBHC do this, but due to confidentiality concerns, this would be much more efficiently done by a school social worker.

School Based Health Centers are like free-standing pediatric clinics and cannot meet the proposed function in Section 3 of decreasing absenteeism. FERPA restricts access of educational information to school district employees. Absenteeism is a complicated problem, requiring a multi-pronged approach by the school. Without access to attendance information, student academic history, and understanding of the child's experience at school, which a SBHC social worker would not have access to, this cannot be effectively addressed. Increasing student access to school-based nurses, psychologists, counselors and social workers can effectively address this issue.

Trauma-informed approaches are already best practice. Trauma-informed approaches are being used across the state increasingly as staff are trained. School nurses, counselors, psychologists and social workers are at the forefront of this and assist their educational colleagues in implementing this approach. Creating a trauma-informed social worker position *outside* of the school is unnecessary and wasteful since they would not have access to children's educational records and could therefore not be as effective with the educational team.

As a nurse, mother of a 13 year old at in middle school, educator and resident, I urge you not support HB2408 and instead to prioritize effective school-based approaches to reducing absenteeism and addressing the pressing mental health needs of children in this state.

Thank you for your time,

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