

Dear Esteemed Members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for hearing the testimony on HB 3395.

I have provided school social work services to students in the Portland metro area for nearly 20 years. During this time, I've held a variety of roles and provided mental health services, addressed severe absenteeism, case management for homeless youth and their families, connected families to a wide range of resources for basic needs, re-connected countless students to school, so that they are able to pursue graduation, done hundreds of home visits, coordinated countless resource events and resolved thousands of issues at schools that were preventing students from being successful. All of these experiences have helped me understand how vital, and unfortunately often missing, school social work services are from Oregon schools.

My experience has also demonstrated to me that school counselors are often unprepared, in terms of training and comfort level, to deal with homelessness and housing instability, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, mental health issues of students and their family members and poverty. In my twenty years providing school social work services, I have never had a school counselor accompany me on a home visit.

Social Workers are uniquely qualified and in some cases licensed to provide specialized, critical services, such as providing crisis mental health diagnosis and interventions. Social Workers also have unique and concentrated education and training in brokering resources, removing institutional barriers for academic success and working with the whole family, not just the child that is enrolled in the school. A critical component of our education is understanding how racism and poverty impact children and families and what we can do alleviate their effects.

I urge you to pass HB 3395 so that school administrators have the autonomy and freedom in these difficult times to select the professional who will truly best meet the needs of their students and school community! This bill will have no budget impact, but will simply allow a way for social workers to increase their positive impact in schools throughout Oregon. Social Workers are prepared and ready to work with extremely vulnerable kids and families to build trust, find resources and take critical steps toward stability and long term educational success.

Respectfully Submitted, Mary Stevens-Krogh LCSW, LSSW