



RE: Testimony in Support of HB 3395

Chair Doherty and Members of the House Committee on Education,

HB 3395 is a simple bill with no fiscal impact. It is designed to give school administrators in grades K-8 the flexibility to hire the school-based team that best meets the needs of their students.

Background

School social workers have served America's public school children for generations. Due to budget cuts, the number of these positions has decreased over time. However, social workers have continued serving students in other ways—as Child Development Specialists (CDS), attendance specialists, after-school program directors and through community-based organizations.

In 2011, the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC) created a new licensure: Licensed School Social Worker (LSSW). This licensure allows social workers to be employed in schools alongside other school-based professionals and share information with teachers, administrators, school nurses and others to improve student outcomes.

The benefits for students and educators are well documented. They include mental health services, trauma-informed care, coordination with families and decreased absenteeism, to name a few. When teachers are able to focus on teaching, morale in the school system improves.

The Problem

Despite this new licensure, many administrators report they are unable to hire school social workers. This is due, in part, to misunderstandings about the state's Comprehensive Framework on Guidance and Counseling. Despite what some may claim, social workers *are* trained with competencies that enable them to implement this Framework. In fact, when employed as CDS, social workers not only implement the Framework, but must also report to the Oregon Department of Education on how they do so. Now that we have the LSSW licensure, there is no reason these professionals cannot continue in these roles as professionals licensed by TSPC.

The Solution

HB 3395 simply says that for any job position called “counselor,” an administrator may opt to fill that role with a school social worker. It might be better to call this position something like “student service provider,” but no such term currently exists in statute. Passing HB 3395 will increase the pool of qualified applicants for these positions. For schools that suffer from high rates of poverty and its effects, a social worker may be the ideal professional to address these deeply-rooted problems.

We see this bill as an opportunity for Oregon students to benefit from the unique approach social workers bring to our schools. We believe school social workers are part of the solution to Oregon's intractable challenges of high absenteeism and low graduation rates.

Ideally, every school would have the funds to hire a school counselor and a school social worker, as well as other student support professionals. However, we know this isn't always the case. HB 3395 is a zero-cost solution to help place our professionals where they are needed most.

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