

April 12, 2017

Dear Chair Doherty and Members of the House Committee on Education,

I am writing in support of HB 3395. I have been a Child Development Specialist, trained as a social worker, for 30 years in the schools. I have a Master of Social Work (MSW) from Portland State University and three years ago became a Licensed School Social Worker (LSSW) from the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC). I was initially hired at a school in Portland Public Schools in 1987 because I had experience working in psychiatric treatment centers and child welfare. The school wanted and needed someone with mental health and social work experience to support their most vulnerable students that they did not know how to respond or advocate for.

For most of my years, I have been the only social service specialist in the elementary school providing the daily social and emotional supports needed for kids and families. I have fulfilled typical counseling and social work roles at my schools as there has never been enough funding to pay for more than one position in the schools where I have worked. Though I was never a teacher, I have taught multiple classroom lessons on bullying prevention, sex abuse prevention, and problem solving in grades K-6 for years. I have provided individual and group counseling. I have trained staff on appropriate responses to trauma. I have responded to multiple family and community needs with my social work training, networking with outside agencies, and connecting families to community resources. **I have read and have easily implemented the expectations laid out in the Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Framework for years. The Oregon Department of Education has child development specialists (CDS) fill out an annual form explaining how they fulfill this Framework in their jobs and has done this for years. ODE believes CDSs who are trained social workers can follow this framework without having a license in school counseling.**

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=393> I have also supervised and trained school social workers and school counselors during their graduate school internships.

Ideally, each school in the State of Oregon would have an interdisciplinary team that included school social workers, school psychologists, school counselors, school nurses, learning specialists, and school-based therapists that would meet the needs of children experiencing the adverse effects of trauma. Unfortunately, the State of Oregon budgets have prevented the effective development of multidisciplinary teams, and with the scarcity of funds comes the scarcity of social service positions. Due to barriers imposed by the state, districts, and the advocacy of other disciplinary groups, school social workers have not been hired in positions for which they are qualified. ***This bill would allow for school social workers to be hired without a fiscal impact.***

In the past, social workers were able to be hired for services that counselors provide at the K-8 level as Child Development Specialists. Now they are still being hired by a few districts but only at the elementary level. Unlike other disciplines, if a district hires an employee under the umbrella of Child Development Specialist, an annual report is required by each CDS and

another by the district in which they have to clearly describe their job duties. Districts have found this to be an unnecessary burden, as they could hire school psychologists or counselors that did not require this additional paperwork.

Not having CDSs licensed by TSPC is an issue of concern for districts who are used to this sense of protection and accountability. ***Licensed School Social Workers now have this license certified by TSPC, so that issue is no longer a barrier. However, school districts are unaware of this and have been led to believe that only licensed school counselors are qualified to hold these positions that social workers have held for many years.***

What all of this means is that children and families in schools have not had access to critical expertise and services that are needed in schools by school social workers. School social workers have the necessary training in mental health, trauma informed practices, and social systems that are needed to support students in many schools today. Ideally, we would have both school counselors and school social workers in schools with great needs, but until the funding for education happens at a level where this would occur, we need flexibility in hiring at the elementary and middle school levels where often there is only one available position.

Allowing administrators and districts to have the flexibility in hiring a licensed school social worker or a licensed school counselor, depending on the school community's needs, is critical for our students' success. **Passing HB 3395 would ensure and support this hiring flexibility, would increase the number school social workers in Oregon schools, and would send a clear message to districts that this is needed for children and families.**

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