

February 8, 2017

To: Representative Margaret Doherty, Chair
House Education Committee

From: Laura Pedersen, PhD

Re: HB 2529 Support

Testimony in Support of HB 2529

Chair Doherty and members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for hearing testimony from the school counseling community in Oregon. My name is Laura Pedersen. I am recently retired after 13 years with the School Counselor Program at the Graduate School of Education and Counseling at Lewis & Clark, and I served as a middle and high school counselor and college planning coordinator prior to my work in higher education.

I am profoundly grateful to Representative Reardon and his legislative assistant, Christina Cloyd, for their support of school counselors and for their commitment to learning about school counseling best practices. Oregon has a passionate and determined body of school counselors who support PK-12 students in their academic, social/emotional, and college and career development on a daily basis, and who are focused on the success of every student in their schools.

The profession of school counseling has undergone substantive and impactful changes in the past 15 years, and Oregon's Framework for School Counseling has long been considered an example of best practices for systemic approaches to meeting the needs of all students and to creating educational environments that support students in creating desired futures. The Framework is in final stages of revision, and I feel strongly that in order for it to be most effective, we must ensure that school administrators understand the many skills and experiences school counselors bring into their buildings.

I have both taught school-counselors-in-training and supervised their internships in the schools for 17 years, 13 of those years in Oregon. I have had ample opportunity to observe the wide range of relationships between school counselors and school administrators, and believe that through these two professionals working more closely together, students can be empowered to succeed, persist, and attain their goals. I have supervised interns in elementary buildings where the only counselor is administrator-in-charge for one to two days a week when the principal is out of the building. I have observed middle schools where counselors spend two, three, or even four hours of a workday in bus or lunch duties. I have seen the exhaustion on the face of high school counselors who spend such extended amounts of time on scheduling or testing that they rarely see students. School counselors are fully engaged team members who should be

expected to contribute to the community in all the same ways other staff members do, but when such great percentages of their time are spent on non-counseling activities, it is a huge waste of expertise. Counselors should be utilized as the specialists in educational success, personal development, and future planning that they are trained to be.

In addition to working with school-counselors-in-training, I have presented the Oregon Framework for School Counseling to several classes of administrators-in-training. I have relished the opportunity to share the many leadership roles in which school counselors are experienced, including data-based decision-making, systemic approaches to creating change on behalf of students, and PK-12 college and career readiness. Many new administrators have expressed surprise that school counselors are trained in much more than mental health counseling. It is imperative that school administrators see the school counseling team as an integral part of school improvement planning, of the creation of inclusive and responsive school communities, and of the commitment to see every student graduate with desirable post-secondary options.

House Bill 2529 is an essential component of creating mutual understanding and targeted programming by school administrators and school counselors. HB 2529 would ensure that administrators have coursework in the Oregon Framework for School Counseling. This would assist in fostering a facilitative school environment where administrators and counselors team to design evidence-based programming in support of all students' academic, college and career, and social/emotional success.

Finally, school counselors are the only permanent staff in school buildings who have explicit training in college and career readiness (OAR 581-022-1510). Comprehensive PK-12 programming in college and career readiness is an essential focal point for student success and persistence, both nationally and in Oregon, and administrators must work with their counseling staff to create educational programs that meet the needs of their unique communities, that involve all school personnel as well as families, and that are implemented and evaluated with transparency.

I respectfully request that monies be allocated to support the important work of collaboration between school administrators and school counselors. This cannot happen without a shared understanding of the many skills and resources school counselors bring to their work, and a mutual commitment to support all students in their academic, social/emotional, and college and career development.