



SALEM KEIZER

Education Association

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Date: February 20, 2018

To: Oregon House Committee on Human Services and Housing

From: Mindy Merritt President of Salem Keizer Education Association

Re: SB 1540

Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the committee, my name is Mindy Merritt. I am a proud educator and President of the Salem Keizer Education Association, SKEA. Salem-Keizer is the second largest school district in our state. SKEA represents over 2,300 members to include: licensed educators, counselors, school psychologists, nurses, therapists, speech and language pathologists and others. Collectively, our members serve over 42,000 students; pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

The Salem Keizer Education Association supports SB 1540. This legislation provides the needed clarification regarding mandatory reporting. This fall, our members were extremely concerned when the district revisited the original language as it is defined within Oregon's mandatory reporting guidelines and we immediately asked for clarification. As an Association, we believe the current interpretation of reporting that the district has provided jeopardizes the trust educators have with students and could have a counterproductive impact on the safety of our students.

As educators, we do everything in our power to protect our students — their health and safety is a foundational priority. As professionals, we take our responsibility as mandatory reporters extremely seriously, because we know that proper reporting helps keep our students safe.

For us to properly fulfill our duties as mandatory reporters, we must have clear and consistent guidance on what should be reported. These guidelines must endeavor to create a balance between student safety, while still allowing for an environment where students can feel comfortable confiding sensitive information with a trusted educator. This is an especially delicate matter when educators are also parents and need to have private conversations with their own children. SB 1540 is necessary to ensure that parents have the ability to counsel their children privately about sexual activity without having to follow up with a mandatory report to Oregon Department of Human Services.

School counselors, Health Teachers and other educators are trained adults who can answer questions about healthy sexuality, birth control, and abstinence. If students believe that their doctors, counselors and educators must report any instance of sexual contact, the likely outcome is a reduction in safe places for students who are most at risk and in need of support.

I want to be clear, we will continue to ensure our educators err on the side of reporting in all instances if there is any concern whatsoever that there is abuse, coercion or force. The health and safety of our students has always been and will continue to be our top priority.

This legislation provides needed and vital guidance and exemptions regarding mandatory reporting and we urge you to support it.

Sincerely,

Mindy Merritt, President
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