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March 8, 2019

RE: House Bill 2940

Chair Doherty and members of the committee:

I am Representative Carla Piluso, and I represent House District 50, the great city of Gresham. I am writing in support of HB 2940, both in my capacity as a State Representative and as a member of the Gresham Barlow School Board.

My district includes the Gresham neighborhood of Rockwood, which is a community of great opportunity. Over 60 languages are spoken in Rockwood. The median age is 27, and over 40% of households have a child under 18. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Rockwood is Gresham's future.

But Rockwood is also a community of great need. Nearly four in ten Rockwood residents receive SNAP, and over one third of the population lives in poverty. Rockwood families struggle with every aspect of poverty that you can imagine—and more often than not, students take that stress with them to school. I saw this in my capacity as the Gresham Police Chief, and I continue to see it as a school board member.

But I also saw, and continue to see, that our students want to move forward. As leaders, it's our job to empower Oregon's young people—and putting social workers in schools is a great step towards doing just that. In Gresham and communities across the state, social workers can have a huge impact. They offer behavioral and mental health support, assist and collaborate with our teachers, and provide our students with counseling and therapy. Social workers can have a positive impact on many of the issues being addressed by the Joint Committee on Student Success, including mental health, drug use, chronic absenteeism, bullying, and graduation rates.

Our students won't give up, and we can't give up on them. School social workers help our students and enhance the investments we are already making in our schools. As a pilot program, this bill will be a good first step to improving educational outcomes and the lives of our children and families.

Sincerely,

Carla C. Piluso
Oregon State Representative, House District 50