

To: House Committee on Education
From: Roberto Aguilar
Date: 3/8/2019
Re: Opposition to HB 2441-1 (Coordinated Comprehensive School Counseling Program)

I am writing to voice concerns about House Bill 2441-1.

My concern is the impact of House Bill 2441-1 as it is currently written, not what I believe is its intent. Specifically, with this being a non-funded legislative directive, I am concerned that the wording of HB 2441-1 creates adversaries out of those who should be allies by creating division instead of inclusion.

First, a school counselor deficit already exists in Oregon. The most current data reports that the average caseload for a school counselor in Oregon is 1 school counselor to 511 students (DATA SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, COMMON CORE OF DATA (CCD), "STATE NONFISCAL PUBLIC ELEMENTARY /SECONDARY EDUCATION SURVEY," 2015-16 v.1a). This is not because of a lack of quality school counselors or quality school counseling graduate programs. This is due to the lack of funds in our districts to hire school counselors. In fact, over the course of my career we have continually "cut" counselors in my building from 5.5 counselors to 3.5 since 2002. The student needs are greater now than ever, yet school counselors simply cannot meet with every student because of these high caseloads. HB 2441-1 does not address this issue. As it is currently written, HB 2441-1 would simply allow school districts to substitute one title (school counselor) for another title (school social worker). With these overwhelming caseloads there is little hope for real progress in terms of helping students be more successful than what is already happening.

Second, school counselors should be working *with* other professionals, such as school social workers, school-based therapists, etc., to create a positive learning environment for students at our schools. School counselors are most effective in helping students achieve success when the ability to collaborate and coordinate with other specialized professionals exists. The best case scenario is when a school counselor has time to meet with a student and can determine whether this student needs mental health support or home based resources and refer to the appropriate specialist (school-based therapist, school social worker, etc.)

My proposal is that HB 2441-1 be revised in what I believe to be simple change. I propose that Line 10 - "(a) School Counselor; or" be amended to read "(a) School Counselor; *WITH*". The word "with" creates space for inclusion where the word "or" creates opposition. We are sure to achieve success for our students if we have more school counselors working in unison with school-based allies. Furthermore, I believe the removal of lines 20 through 22 would be appropriate with the aforementioned change.

In conclusion, I urge that you **DO NOT** support HB 2441-1 in its current form and considered the proposed amendments.

Sincerely,

Roberto Aguilar

School Counselor since 2002.
Milwaukie High School, Milwaukie, Oregon.