

Dear Representative Doherty,

I am writing to ask for your support for School Social Workers. Two important bills are going to be heard Monday 3/11/19 HB 2441, which clarifies that School Social Workers can implement comprehensive school counseling framework and HB 2940 establishes a pilot program to increase public schools served by school social workers and appropriates 20 million for districts to apply for grants to do this.

School social work services are essential in schools in responding to students who are:

- Impacted by trauma
- Facing housing instability and homelessness
- Dealing with the effects of poverty
- Struggling with mental health issues
- Supporting marginalized and historically underserved communities
- Dealing with the impacts of substance abuse
- Implementing cultural-responsive approaches for students and their families

School social workers also have the training and education that makes them uniquely qualified to understand and develop systems that support students and families with the biggest barriers to academic achievement and subsequent life success. All school social workers have explicit education around systemic racism and discrimination, which is a central factor in Oregon's persistently low graduation rates for students of color.

My personal experience seeing school social workers make a difference for students includes offering culturally-responsive therapeutic approaches in addition culturally-responsive interventions. Being a woman of color, I have witnessed students of color being more engaged in one-on-one therapy sessions. I have also been able to provide support to school staff and families of color in how to navigate the school system in order for their student to succeed in their academic goals.

We are urging you to vote **YES** on HB 2441 and HB 2940! These bills will give Oregon's school children the chance to:

- Access mental health services at school
- Connect with resources and agencies that provide support for basic needs, such as housing, food and utilities
- Have assistance in navigating complex systems within schools districts
- Get connected to resources for domestic violence services
- Get connected to resources for sexually minority youth and families
- Get connected to culturally specific resources and supports
- Referrals and connections to youth and adult substance abuse providers and services

Thank you for your support,

Virginia Gomez, LSSW, MSW