

To: House Committee on Education

From: Kate Bowles

Date: 3/13/2019

Re: Opposition to HB 2441-1 (Coordinated Comprehensive School Counseling Program)

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

I am concerned about the impact of House Bill 2441-1 as it is written. Currently, this bill creates an unhealthy competition between groups whose cooperation in school setting is often vital to student success. School counselors are already understaffed in schools. The National Standard put forth by the American School Counseling Association sets the ideal counselor to student ratio at 1:250. The state of Oregon is nowhere near that standard with the average caseload of the school counselor being 1:511 according to the US Department of Education (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 a choice made by districts due to lack of funding, not to an shortage of available and employable school counselors. Social workers are a vital support to school counselors, but are not a replacement for them. HB 2441-1 does not address the funding issue at the root of the lack of resources in schools today. Social workers in the place of school counselors would continue to have overwhelming caseloads without the school counselor education and training to implement a comprehensive counseling program, a requirement from the Oregon Department of Education.

I have worked in a variety of school settings thus far in my career - urban, suburban, magnet, and now rural. My current caseload is 1:630 with no funding for an additional school counselor in sight. Each year when the Division 22 Assurances are submitted, school counselors are not asked for their input around the OAR's that pertain to them and if it was given, it would show that we are not in compliance with ODE standards. Creating division between overloaded school counselors and their allies would only continue to set them back in supporting every student as they do not receive the necessary support from school districts themselves.

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.

Sincerely,

Kate Bowles

School Counselor since 2014.

Baker Prairie Middle School, Canby, OR.