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To: House Education Committee  
From: Larry Conner MA LPC, ORCA Public Policy and Advocacy Chair  
Date: March 29, 2019  
Re: HB 2441

Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee,

The Oregon Counseling Association applauds the effort to increase the number of School Counselors in Oregon that is contained in HB 2441. We believe that will help to address the high levels of suicidal activity and mental health issues in Oregon's youth.

Though the Oregon Counseling Association supports the essential role of School Social Workers, we are concerned that their training and experience is not the equivalent to that of School Counselors. A School Counselor, even when they are getting an initial license from the Teachers Standards and Practices Commission, must have several years of classroom teaching experience or they must be involved in a practicum course in the classroom during their graduate training. School Social Workers have no such requirement. We believe that every school counselor should understand what goes on in a classroom and how individual students' learning styles vary. Without that knowledge, School Social Workers functioning as School Counselors would lack an essential part of what is needed in the School Counseling role.

I was a High School Counselor for four years before starting my career as a Licensed Professional Counselor working with adults. Before that I was a High School English teacher for five years. I know how important it is for a School Counselor to understand that students learn in different ways, and that teachers teach in different ways, and how to help facilitate a dialogue between a teacher and a student when teaching and learning styles conflict. That knowledge is not contained in the training for School Social Workers. Furthermore, School Social Workers are not required to have explicit training in the areas of academic child development, career and life planning, appraisal and testing, and Special Education. We believe those to be essential parts of the role of a School Counselor. HB 2441 wants to allow School Social Workers to be involved in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in schools, when they do not have the adequate training to do so and School Counselors do. We must remember that School Counselors have multiple roles: as first line defenders of mental health of our young, and as educators who help our youth be successful in school and in life. Anyone functioning as a School Counselor should have both skills.

For these reasons we ask that you amend HB 2441 to allow School Social Workers to function as School Counselors only after they have received the same level of training that School Counselors now receive, including classroom experience. Alternatively, we would prefer that you just increase funding to hire more School Counselors.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Larry Conner MA LPC