

To: House Committee on Rules

From: Kate Bowles, Professional School Counselor

Date: May 6, 2019

Re: Opposition to HB 2876-1 (Coordinated Comprehensive School Counseling Program)

I am writing in opposition to House Bill 2876-1. I recognize that changes have been made in the language stating that “qualified persons” will not practice outside of the scope of their licence. While the language has improved from its previous draft, it still leave room for social workers to be put in a position to oversee a Comprehensive School Counseling Program, which is beyond their scope.

I previously submitted testimony regarding my experiences as a Professional School Counselor. I work in a rural area in which school counselors were eliminated in elementary schools and only brought back when they were legally required to by ODE. We are having to build our programming as a k-12 program all over again which requires a great deal of education for administrators, board members, and other staff. Social workers do not have the knowledge or expertise to implement a comprehensive program, as shown by another testimony submitted previously by OSCA President-Elect Emily Sallee. The degrees are different in areas that matter greatly. In the last hearing, we listened to a school social worker and principal present together about how important it was that they had a school social worker. I do not disagree with this. School social workers are a vital part of a comprehensive program. We also heard that principal say that academic focus did not matter in an elementary school - that they only needed the social/emotional focus. The school social worker agreed and indicated her work in that area. As a Middle School Counselor, I can tell you firsthand the importance of academic focus being a part of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program. Our students enter the middle school as 7th graders without the organizational, study, and time management skills required of them. A Professional School Counselor must be the individual to oversee the implementation of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program as they are trained to see the big picture, not just the social/emotional piece.

This is just one example in one district, and there are so many others I could add from my 10+ years experience in education. It is disheartening to see a bill pushed through that will so obviously negatively impact rural and low-income schools specifically, who may not have as many applicants. School social workers are a vital asset and teammate, but are not qualified to implement a Comprehensive School Counseling Program. I urge that you not support HB 2876-1. The view from where I sit as the only School Counselor in a building of 620 students (the ASCA National Model stipulates the ratio should be counselor to student 1:250) is that this bill is not motivated by looking at what is best for students, but at what is best for a university degree program. To do what is best for students is to not support this bill and instead look at funding school social workers in all schools ALONGSIDE the School Counselor who implements the program.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kate Bowles
Professional School Counselor, Canby School District