



**Office of the Dean**  
School of Social Work

Post Office Box 751                      503-725-4712 tel.  
Portland, Oregon 97207-0751        503-725-5545 fax  
1800 SW 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Ste. 600  
Portland, Oregon 97201                www.pdx.edu/ssw

May 22, 2019

Dear Chair Burdik and the Senate Committee on Rules,

Portland State University School of Social Work **supports HB 2876. HB 2876 will provide a mechanism for school districts to add licensed school social workers to the team of professionals addressing the needs of students.** Adding school social workers to the list of professionals qualified to address students' behavioral health needs will add expertise in the areas of trauma informed practice, mental health and substance abuse intervention, and an understanding of how family, cultural and community factors impact student success.

**This bill is not about a desire to have social workers become or replace school counselors. Social workers have a unique, distinct, academically rigorous, licensed and nationally recognized professional perspective that compliments that of other school professionals.**

**This bill is about giving principals choice to fill gaps in their staffing and address urgent mental health and well-being needs of their students.**

**This bill strengthens existing policy and clarifies the important role of social work as part of the professional team who collectively seek to improve student outcomes across the state of Oregon.**

**Professional Social Workers are Integral to the Success of Oregon Schools and Students**

**Higher needs and fewer resources** – According to the 2014 National School Social Work Survey students seen by Oregon social workers have greater needs than the national average based on higher involvement with special education, community mental health, child welfare and juvenile justice services. Oregon school social workers note that large caseloads and restrictions of their role by administrators or district policy were challenges to serving more students. (Portrait of Oregon School Social Workers Findings from the National School Social Work Survey 2014.

**Unmet mental health needs** - Research suggests that 18-20 percent of students have mental health issues significant enough to cause impairment to major life functions (Dore, 2005), yet only one in five receives necessary services (Kaffenberger, Seligman, 2007). Students with untreated mental health issues may develop more significant problems which can greatly impact their educational experience and result in poor educational outcomes.(Erford, Newsome & Rock, 2007). Using the Effective School Staffing Model, the School Social Work Association of America recommends a ratio of 1 school social worker per 250 students (School Social Work Association of America).

**Chronic Absenteeism** – The Chronic Absenteeism Report (2016) commissioned by Oregon’s Chief Education Office and coauthored by Dr. Ann Curry-Stevens, PSU School of Social Work faculty, noted Oregon has one of the highest levels of chronic absenteeism. One in five Oregon students routinely misses more than 10 percent of their school days, which increases in high school and contributes to 26 percent of students not graduating on time. Students of color, students with disabilities and students living in poverty are at the greatest risk for absenteeism. Some of the recommendations to address this problem are:

- Increase educator professional development and support with respect to building culturally responsive and sustaining practices and school communities.
- Increase the number of meaningful partnerships between schools/districts and community based organizations, especially culturally specific organizations.
- Revise policies and procedures to eliminate discipline disparities.

**Impact of Trauma** - The Oregon legislature and the Oregon Health Authority have recognized the impact of psychological trauma on health, mental health and school outcomes. House Bill 4002 “requires professional development and support for school staff ... to create a culture in the district and community that is informed about how to understand, recognize and respond to trauma.” Trauma Informed Oregon, based in the PSU School of Social Work, is the statewide collaboration developed to promote and sustain trauma informed care, currently provides the core professional training around the state on trauma informed practices. Social Workers are uniquely trained to collaborate with other school professionals to address these Challenges.

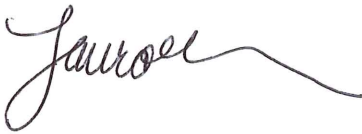
**Portland State University School of Social Work** prepares masters level social workers (MSW) around the state. **It is the oldest, largest, and only public school of social work, created 55 years ago by the Oregon State Legislature to fulfill the social work workforce needs for the state of Oregon which it has faithfully done during the last half century.** Since 2011, it has a school social work specialization that leads to the TSPC initial School Social Worker license. Social workers are trained to assess and intervene on the individual, family, community and organizational level and to provide linkages between communities, schools, families, and students that promote student success.

PSU’s MSW Program aims to prepare graduates for initial school social worker licensing and for effective professional practice as school social workers. Guided by an ecological framework, social work values, and a commitment to culturally responsive, effective, and efficient practice, the School Social Worker curriculum is designed to build competencies related to working with students, families, schools, communities, and the larger society. The aim of school social work is to improve educational outcomes for students by: (1) removing structural barriers to learning; (2) increasing collaboration among schools, families, and communities; and (3) creating relationships with and among students, families, and communities that will promote positive functioning. In addition, students complete 1000 hours of field practicum, 500 hours in a K-12 school setting and the other 500 hours are in a community based agency serving children, youth, and families. School social workers are key to the multi-tiered systems of support. As collaborators with other professionals they are situated to address school culture, as well as the individual, family, and community issues that impact school success. School social workers can:

- Work across disciplines to support student success
- Identify and address student mental health issues
- Identify and address family and environmental factors that impact school success
- Develop meaningful, culturally specific partnerships with families and communities
- Assess organizational structures and policies for their cultural responsiveness
- Assess and advocate for policies to address racial disparities
- Educate staff about and implement trauma informed practices
- Intervene to support students and families living in poverty
- Utilize evidence based prevention and intervention strategies to address psychosocial factors that impact student outcomes

**We urge the Oregon Senate Committee on Rules to support HB 2876. Oregon school districts need to have choices for how best to meet the needs of their children and families.**

Respectfully submitted,



Laura Burney Nissen, Ph.D., LMSW, CADC III  
Dean and Professor  
School of Social Work  
(Former Addictions Social Worker in Schools)



Keva Miller, Ph.D., LCSW  
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs  
Associate Professor  
School of Social Work  
(Former School Social Worker)