

Members of the House Education Committee,

The intention of this communication is to address House Bill 3395. The passing of this bill would allow school districts to employ individuals licensed as Social Workers to provide services traditionally provided by Professional School Counselors.

As the current President of the Oregon School Counselor Association, I am writing on behalf of myself and in conjunction with the Past President and the President Elect of the Oregon School Counselor Association. I am a licensed Professional School Counselor and have been practicing in the Portland Metro area for the past eight years. I also teach for Lewis and Clark's School Counseling Masters Program, and so I feel well versed in the field with regard to the specific roles and responsibilities that only a Professional School Counselor has training and experience to perform.

We unanimously request that you vote NO on this bill. Social Workers do not have the educational preparation to provide the comprehensive counseling and guidance services stipulated in OARs 541-022-1510, 541-022-0405, or 541-022-1130. Our specific concerns center on the obvious lack of training in the American School Counselor Association's National Model for School Counseling, a lack of career and college preparation courses/training, and a lack of training required regarding Special Education and the needs of special populations. These are extensive student needs in schools and as such, Professional School Counselors are required to receive this training to meet OAR and licensure requirements to serve ALL students. Additionally, Professional School Counselors are required to provide academic assistance and guidance to all students regarding specific graduation requirements, scheduling and college, and career planning and preparation. These services are essential for students to enter the world after high school as is evidenced by the abundance of requirements listed about college and career planning in OARs 541-022-1510, 541-022-0405, or 541-022-1130.

Social Workers are not adequately prepared to meet the requirements of these aforementioned OARs; it would be unethical for them to be placed in these roles. Additionally, it would not be in the best interests of students or the school buildings and districts in which they are placed, or even in the best interests of the Social Worker. These professionals would be expected to perform job duties they have not received adequate training in and that fact may lead to job dissonance. As a Professional School Counselor, I can attest to the importance and value of Social Workers firsthand and advocate strongly for their involvement and hiring in schools...as Social Workers. We are meant to work in tandem, not interchangeably.

We beseech you to vote NO on House Bill 3395. We also recommend that a special committee or commission be convened to review the preparation standards for Social Workers to determine if they are being adequately prepared to fulfill these OARs or, at the very least, that you seek input from the ODE Specialists legally responsible for seeing that these legal mandates be fulfilled.

Sincerely,

Holly Thompson, OSCA President
Katie Loewen, OSCA Past President
Emily Sallee, OSCA President Elect

