

Dear Legislator,

I am writing to ask for your support for School Social Workers. Two important bills are going to be heard Monday 3/11/19 HB 2441, which clarifies that School Social Workers can implement comprehensive school counseling framework and HB 2940 establishes a pilot program to increase public schools served by school social workers and appropriates 20 million for districts to apply for grants to do this.

School social work services are essential in schools in responding to students who are: (pick the ones that are true for your experience or school community)

- Impacted by trauma
- Facing housing instability and homelessness
- Dealing with the effects of poverty
- Living in homes with domestic violence
- Struggling with mental health issues
- Supporting marginalized and historically underserved communities
- Implementing systems of change
- Dealing with the impacts of substance abuse

School social workers also have the training and education that makes them uniquely qualified to understand and develop systems that support students and families with the biggest barriers to academic achievement and subsequent life success. All school social workers have explicit education around systemic racism and discrimination, which is a central factor in Oregon's persistently low graduation rates for students of color.

When you walk into Maureen's tiny room, everywhere you look are supplies that students often need, but cannot access elsewhere. She has tirelessly collected food, clothing, school supplies and gift cards for students and their families. I have had several families would not have a Christmas tree or presents for their families during Christmas if it was not for Maureen's collection of money and gifts. These families rely on Maureen year after year. One student's, single mom lost her job and was behind on rent. It was the student birthday and I happened to figure out he was not getting anything. I told Maureen and I was able to give him a \$25.00 gift certificate to Ross. The student was excited and thanked me profusely and said, "Wow this day isn't going bad as I thought it would." When students are hungry, anxious, lonely, suicidal or any given combination, she is able to provide them with food and tender loving care.

I also have had several students with severe mental health challenges that stretch my ability to support, given the limits of a teaching schedule and large caseload. Maureen has step up time and time again to pull students out of the cracks in the system and help them become successful. This type of success takes compassion and time not easy, given the imitated resources of the system. Not only is she a support to students but to staff as well. Over the years, I have met with Maureen and my students and she was able to help us both move on in positive profound ways. She is a steady, strong and compassionate co-worker, mentor and provides a light for students and staff to move forward.

We are urging you to vote **YES** on HB 2441 and HB 2940! These bills will give Oregon's school children the chance to:(pick the ones that are true from your experience)

- Access mental health services at school
- Connect with resources and agencies that provide support for basic needs, such as housing, food and utilities
- Have assistance in navigating complex systems within schools districts
- Get connected to resources for domestic violence services
- Get connected to resources for sexually minority youth and families
- Get connected to culturally specific resources and supports
- Referrals and connections to youth and adult substance abuse providers and services

Thank you for your support,
Susanne Cuatt
Special Education