

House Bill 2876-1: Coordinated Comprehensive School Counseling Program
House Committee on Rules
May 6, 2019

Dear Chairman Holvey and Members of the House Committee on Rules,

I am speaking on behalf of the Oregon School Counselor Association and the Oregon Association of School Counselor Educators and Supervisors in opposition to HB 2876 that would allow school social workers to be hired to perform the duties of an elementary school counselor.

I will note for the record that this is my 44th year serving the students of Oregon either as a school counselor or a school counselor educator. I will also note I served on Representative Hernandez's taskforce that met during the summer of 2018 regarding this issue. I was surprised and disappointed that this bill was re-introduced given that I was informed last summer that the Dean of the College of Education and the Dean of the School of Social Work at Portland State University would be meeting to determine the additional coursework that the school social workers should take in order to be able to be hired as school counselors. University protocol typically requires that in order for a program to offer another degree program that is already offered at that same university, the School Social Work program would have to have that new program approved by the Graduate Faculty Curriculum Council and then the Graduate Faculty Council. I have communicated with the Portland State Dean of the College of Education to see if these steps have been taken.

I also want to be clear that we need more school counselors and more school social workers to adequately address the behavioral and mental health needs of our k-12 students. In the most recent Mental Health America report, Oregon ranked 44th with regards to meeting the mental health needs of our children and adolescents. Everyone is thus fully aware that the burden of meeting these needs falls on educators and yet, Oregon ranks 40th in the nation for student-counselor ratios at 498-1.

My opposition to this bill is twofold.

1. Representative Jeff Reardon presented a bill in the 2016-17 legislative session to the House Education Committee on behalf of the Oregon School Counselor Association and the Oregon Association of School Counselor Educators and Supervisors. This bill would have required Teacher Standards and Practices Commission to add coursework on comprehensive school counseling to the administrator licensure requirements. The House Education Committee defeated that bill indicating that the Legislature was not the body that dealt with educator licensure requirements but rather that TSPC was the government body authorized to make such changes. Why is Representative Hernandez's bill being treated differently? Also note that in the 2016-17 legislative session, that Representative Hernandez presented almost the identical bill as this one and it was not passed out of the House Education Committee.
2. Secondly, this bill contravenes existing law regarding the preparation and licensure of school counselors. I do not understand why you would pass a law that contravenes existing law and significantly advantages school social workers at the expense of school counselors:

- a. OAR 581-022-2060 stipulates the role and function of the school counselor in implementing the district's comprehensive school counseling program. School counselor education students at each of the five institutions offering master's degrees take coursework to prepare them for this role and function whereas this coursework is not a part of the school social work program.
- b. TSPC requires school counselor master's students fulfill the requirements of OAR 584-0180-0305 and demonstrate competency in eight different school counseling domains. This OAR also requires that those who do not have two years of teaching experience must complete a 200-hour teaching practicum. Once again, school social work students do not have to meet either of these requirements.

I am in full support of school social workers being able to serve as school counselors k-12 if they take additional coursework that many MSWs and SSWs have taken in the past to meet these existing TSPC OARs and become as fully prepared to serve Oregon's youth as are school counselors.

Sincerely,

Gene Eakin, PhD

Advocacy Chair: Oregon School Counselor Association

Advocacy Chair: Oregon Association of School Counselor Educators and Supervisors