

May 22, 2019

The Honorable Ginny Burdick
Chair, Oregon Senate Committee on Rules

The Honorable Herman Baertschiger Jr.
Vice-Chair, Oregon Senate Committee on Rules

RE: Support for HB 2876-A

Chair Burdick, Vice-Chair Baertschiger, and Members of the Committee,

Most social workers in Oregon are licensed by the State Board of Licensed Social Workers. However, in 2012, the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission added a licensure for “school social workers” that allows social workers’ participation on the school-based team alongside other professionals with licensure and oversight from the same agency.

In the last few years, our members have reported cases in which an administrator would like to hire a social worker but feels he or she may not. This mostly occurs in kindergarten through eighth grades, where usually the budget allows for just one behavioral health professional. It did not seem right to us that social workers could not be hired because many of our members already serve in this capacity throughout the state. It also did not seem right because our professionals are licensed in the same chapter of TSPC regulations as school counselors.

To address this issue, we brought a bill in 2017, but unfortunately, it was worded in a way that implied social workers can take the jobs of counselors and *become* counselors simply by passing a bill. That was never our intention. Rather, our intention is to have the opportunity to serve students when desired by local school officials.

A work group was formed, led by Rep. Diego Hernandez and attended by the Legislative Policy and Research Office, the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), the Confederation of School Administrators, Portland State University, Oregon State University, and groups representing social workers and counselors.

When we peeled back the layers, we realized one of the major barriers within school hiring practices is the state-manded “comprehensive counseling framework,” a set of education standards that each school designs and implements. The word “counseling” implies that job postings must be for a counselor, which, as described above, is a specific TSPC professional that is distinct from a school social worker.

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In the course of the work group, we learned from ODE that their reading of the law and the *de facto* practice is that schools may implement the framework with a combination of professionals working collaboratively. Therefore, HB 2876-A was written to simply clarify that the “counseling framework” is not implemented only by counselors, but rather, there is flexibility in implementation depending on the abilities of multiple professionals on the school-based team.

This bill is not an attempt to expand anyone’s licensure or scope of practice. Further, it does not require schools to post job openings in any particular way.

We all care about the wellbeing of Oregon’s school kids and making sure they receive the highest standards of excellence in public education. HB 2876-A will allow local decisionmakers to assemble the team that best meets their students’ unique needs. It will also expand the pool of qualified candidates for schools seeking to hire a behavioral health professional, especially in rural Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Delmar de la Torre Stone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Delmar de la Torre Stone, LMSW
Executive Director, Oregon Chapter