

April 7, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thomsen, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education.

My name is Jamie Smith. I have been a school nurse in Oregon for about 15 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of SB 356.

I served as the State School Nurse Consultant in the Public Health Division at the Oregon Health Authority from 2015-2019, and I am currently the Coordinator of School Health Services at the Multnomah Education Service District in Portland. MESD's School Health Services Department provides school nurses and school health assistants to the public school districts in Multnomah County, so this bill is very relevant to our agency.

- School health is more than bandaids and ice packs. The many components of school health (nursing, therapists, assessments) are necessary to meet the needs of students who require accommodations in order to have full access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE).
- School nurses specifically provide assessment and interventions to remove health-related barriers to a student's education. This includes students with chronic health conditions like diabetes and severe allergies and those students with disabilities that may require constant nursing care throughout the school day.
- Research shows that robust school health programs are a key component of ensuring kids are safe, healthy and ready to learn.
- Contrary to some public perception, Oregon is far from having a nurse in every building, as-is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses. Because of their huge caseloads, school nurses in Oregon are asked to delegate to unregulated assistive personnel and train school staff how to respond to health problems in their absence. Data on staffing is available in the Annual School Nurse Report, released by ODE every October.
- Despite best of intentions, too often there are silos between our health policy experts at OHA and ODE.
- This disconnect has existed for a while, but the pandemic has really highlighted the need for in-house, nursing expertise at ODE to support school health.
- The ability of the nurse to be the bridge between health and education and translate health guidance into the educational setting has been demonstrated many times over the past 12 months.
- School nursing experts have been critical in implementation of RSSL guidance and it took a lot of advocacy and push to be at the table. Having a dedicated position at ODE, specifically a registered nurse with on the ground experience would have made the roll-out smoother.
- With the broad-ranging education and training that a nurse obtains, a registered nurse in this proposed position at ODE would have the understanding to support all school health

professionals, including OT/PT/SLP, school psychs to name a few. Even making sure that physical and mental health services are integrated with school counselors, school social workers, and school psychs is a role that having a nurse in this position can provide.

- Along these lines, TSPC defines 'school nurse' as a registered nurse qualified to conduct and coordinate the health service programs of a school.
- At MESD, we see value in SB 356, but we also recognize that many schools in the state don't have access to a school nurse at all. It will be especially helpful for those districts who lack local expertise to have a dedicated resource at ODE to expand support of school health policy issues.
- Many health-related rules at ODE need to have some attention and be updated to reflect current circumstances. OSNA has advocated with ODE for 2+ years for this position with no success so it seems like having the Legislature's support for ODE to create this position can help make sure this doesn't keep getting pushed down the road.
- It is important that this be a dedicated, full-time position because we already have a shortage of nurses in our state. In order for ODE to attract a well-qualified applicant into this role, the position and associated benefits need to at least come close to matching what someone could find in the private sector.
- Without that, we end up with ODE tacking school health work onto other positions, most recently wonderful colleagues, but colleagues without a healthcare provider background.
- As the professionals on the ground providing these services, we're asking you to mandate a dedicated School Nurse Specialist position at ODE to work with the State School Nurse Consultant at OHA to expand support for our 197 districts in meeting the needs of all students, but especially those who are medically fragile.
- While this is the year that we could have come to the Legislature asking for funds to support additional nurses for school districts, OSNA recognized that budgets would be tight and that the needed state level support was an important next step.

Thanks for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions.