

SB 5315 – Governor Request, Increasing School Staffing January 30, 2019 | Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the Committee. For the record I am Robin Zaback testifying for Washington State PTA in support on SB 5315, the state's largest and oldest child advocacy organization with more than 133,000 members.

Washington State PTA advocates for the health, safety, well-being and education of all children. This whole-child approach has led our members to adopt a position of making strategic investments to close opportunity and achievement gaps. We recognize that non-teaching staff such as nurses, counselors, social workers, psychologists and parent involvement coordinators are critical to supporting social emotional learning and foundational to the academic success of students.

We are very appreciative of the enhanced staffing in this bill.

We would support one change, however. which is to increase staffing levels at high-needs high schools as well as the elementary and middle schools.

In the Northshore School District, for example we have:

1 nurse/6,077 students

1 social worker/15,113 students

.6 psychologist /22,564 students

I think you would agree with me that those staffing levels are insufficient.

Washington State PTA recognizes that it an expensive lift to increase the number of adults in a building who are focused on student health and well-being. We understand there will need to be phasing in, as well as choices about what to fund this biennium. And we appreciate the Governor's approach

Please know that data shows the critical importance of positive school climate in promoting safe schools and preventing school violence.

Counselors, social workers, and parent involvement coordinators, along with mental health and behavioral supports, are necessary to support this shift in school culture.

Investing in these essential education professionals will reap dividends in our schools. Please consider expanding the ratios to include high-needs high schools, and to vote Senate Bill 5315 out of committee. Thank you.