

Dear Esteemed Committee Members:

My name is Kristen McCown, and I am an Oregon Speech-Language Pathologist. I am writing to voice my support for SB 580, which calls for making caseload size a mandatory subject of collective bargaining. Over the past 23 years, I have served in numerous school buildings (K-5, K-8, 6-8, 9-12, K-12, and EI/ECSE) in both rural and urban settings across the state. I currently have the privilege of serving at an elementary school in Bend, Oregon. Over my years of service, my caseload size has varied from manageable (~35 students) to completely unacceptable (~100 students). One thing has been clear throughout my years of service: caseload size/workload directly correlates to the amount of service time delivered to students AND to the quality of service delivered to students.

During years that my caseload has been manageable, I have been able to provide more frequent and longer sessions to students who need speech-language therapy. I have been able to collaborate more frequently and more effectively with teachers, parents, administrators, and educational assistants during these times. I have had more time to plan student lessons. I have been able to provide more timely screenings and evaluations, to complete reports more rapidly, and to actually bring additional students into my program because of these more reasonable caseload sizes.

Unfortunately, I have also experienced times when my caseload was impossible to manage. I found myself ineffective at collaborating with staff—in some cases I was placed in multiple buildings and barely even spoke with my colleagues. I did not have adequate time to screen and evaluate students who desperately needed speech-language interventions, and those students waited for months to be added to my caseload. I found myself working 60, 70, and even 80 hours a week, and still trying to balance a family life at home. This extreme workload had a profound impact on my mental health, my sleep, and my overall feeling of well-being. I eventually ended up leaving those school districts, leaving behind established relationships with my students and families, and taking my expertise with me, in order to find a different school system that placed a higher value on students having adequate time with their therapists. Over the years I have worked with NUMEROUS specialists who have left districts due to high caseload sizes.

Make no mistake, caseload size directly impacts both the level of services and the quality of services to our most vulnerable children in our public school settings. Oregon's students deserve more than being a number on a caseload. They deserve quality, well-planned, collaborative services that can be delivered in a timely and equitable fashion. The lack of established caseload sizes in this state does not allow for the consistent provision of exemplary services statewide. I strongly encourage you to support SB 580; I strongly urge you to support our educators and our students!

With Respect,

Kristen McCown, MS, CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologist

written out, that is approximately 400-450 words)