

March 10, 2025

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jeff Gierer and I was a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) in Portland Public Schools for 14 years. I am writing in support of House Bill 2423.

Over the last two years, Portland Public Schools special education management purposely under-staffed and decentralized the speech-language pathologist specialist team dedicated to evaluating and determining support for students in need of feeding and swallowing intervention (against the advice of our national accrediting body and the urging of the nearly one hundred Portland Public Schools speech-language pathologists). Supporting students with feeding and swallowing needs is provided only by speech-language pathologists and appropriately licensed medical professionals with highly specialized training and competence. In the wake of Portland Public Schools special education management's decision, district speech-language pathologists (myself included) felt compelled to do things outside of their professional comfort and competence. Other district administrators also heard and shared the message that feeding and swallowing support for children was "no big deal" (rather than an essential area of medical support that keeps students safe and healthy). The message from district managers (none of whom were speech-language pathologists or feeding/swallowing medical specialists themselves) was that they knew best about how to determine feeding and swallow support for children. The situation was concerning at the least – and dangerous at worst.

Had the task force that HB2423 recommends been created, Portland Public School management might have made different, safer decisions for students and speech-language pathologists – and clinicians (like myself) might have remained in the district.

Thank you for considering supporting HB 2423 so that Oregon's licensing boards can provide clear and safe guidelines for school based medical professionals so we can continue to keep our students safe.

Sincerely,

William (Jeff) Gierer, M.S., CCC-SLP