

HB 2423 Written Testimony

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

My name is Carol Shapiro and I am a school speech-language pathologist (speech therapy) for Clackamas Education Service District. I work for a program for Kinder-21 year old students with high support needs due to their disabilities. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB2423, which will establish the School-Based Health Professionals Taskforce to ensure that licensing board rules accurately reflect the realities of working in school settings.

Working as a school based clinician I have a role in acquiring third party reimbursement so the district can recoup some funds for services provided. This is primarily through billing Medicaid for speech therapy sessions. It is often seen as a thankless task piled onto our already overflowing plate, but I know how necessary these funds are for our districts when they're trying to set their budgets. Now more than ever it's important for schools to secure any funding possible so that they can keep services for students going without interruptions.

My current employer is still healing several years later from the fallout of the COVID pandemic when they had to layoff a large chunk of staff and then try to rehire them once schools began again. Of course this was impossible as many of their long time, reliable staff had to find other jobs to survive, and returning to working in a school where their pay was lower and the job was more demanding was just too big an ask. As a result we've had huge turnover in staff over the last few years such that working conditions are more difficult now because the average level of experience was much lower. Our program doesn't run smoothly because of lack of staff experience, and the bumps cause enough difficulty that it's hard to keep people around long enough to improve. This leads to people resigning within 1 school year or less and the program losing all the time/training invested in them. We're slowly healing but it is very much a 2 step forward, 1 step back kind of process. If we had the funds available to keep these people on the payroll during Covid we wouldn't be hurting so bad years after the fact.

While Medicaid billing alone can't keep the lights on at a school building, it's a very important part of school funding. In Oregon, SLP's must have an ASHA (American Speech and Hearing Assoc.) Certificate of Clinical Competency to bill Medicaid. You can work as an SLP in schools some places, but if you don't have the additional certification you can't contribute to Medicaid billing for the district. By and large this is an unnecessary requirement that was created mostly through lobbying by ASHA, which is

just a professional organization. It is entirely feasible for the Oregon SLP licensing board (Dept. of Health) to manage any requirements Medicaid billing might have. This would also open up the possibility for more districts to bill Medicaid with their non-ASHA certified SLPs, and it would support working SLPs in Oregon by removing a barrier to employment.

This would improve recruitment and retention, ensuring that schools can attract and keep qualified professionals to support students. However, to do this would require some highly specific legislation when legislators are already swamped with addressing other issues faced by their constituents.

HB2423 ensures that licensing boards have a dedicated space to discuss how their rules function in school settings—this is not about workload, but about making sure regulations are appropriate for professionals working in schools. This could help identify and develop recommendations for the legislative bodies to consider, saving legislators time in learning about this very specialized area of licensure.

I urge you to support HB2423 so that Oregon's licensing boards can establish clear, appropriate guidelines for school-based health professionals, improving both professional retention and student access to necessary services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Carol Shapiro, SLP-CCC

Clackamas ESD

OSHA & OEA member