

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2423, which would establish a Task Force on Licensed Health Care Services in Oregon Schools. For the record, my name is Wendy Niskanen. I have been a school nurse for more than 20 years, and I act as the Executive Director of the Oregon School Nurses' Association and am Co-Chair of the Oregon Education Association Health Professionals Committee. I am testifying on behalf of both organizations and the students of Oregon.

In 2022, the OEA Health Professionals Committee held listening sessions to gather input from licensed health professionals practicing in the school setting. Remarkably, 48% of the feedback received during these sessions focused on the misalignment between licensure rules and education policy and practice.

Students in Oregon rely on the services provided by licensed health care professionals, such as Registered Nurses (RN), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN), Occupational Therapists (OT), Physical Therapists (PT), Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP), and Qualified Mental Health Providers with various licenses, to access their education, remain healthy, stay in school, and be ready to learn. These health professionals practice in accordance with licensure regulations in an educational environment that is not designed to support the delivery of health care services. Unfortunately, educators often lack a full understanding of the constraints that licensure rules impose on health professionals, which can create misalignment between educational practices and licensure requirements. This disconnect creates significant barriers to the provision of evidence-based care, putting students at risk and preventing health professionals from practicing in accordance with their licensure.

The disconnect between licensure rules and school practices manifests in various ways; I urge you to read submitted testimony to learn more about them, and I will give you two examples. First, health professionals do not have access to adequate systems which satisfy regulatory requirements for the documentation of the care they provide. As a result, their practices are less efficient and student care can be negatively impacted. Adequate electronic health records improve continuity of care, reduce errors, enable health providers to meet the requirements of their licenses, and maximize the potential for Medicaid billing.

Second, education staff sometimes conflate the roles of different specialists and require them to provide services outside of their scope of practice or competency which put students (and licenses) at risk. For example, in some school districts or ESDs, nurses and speech language pathologists who do not have the specific competency to create

feeding/swallow plans for students at high risk for choking and aspiration are expected to lead feeding teams.

Licensed health professionals have been grappling with these issues for decades. This ongoing struggle negatively impacts student care and is a major cause of workforce instability. Health professionals who are not permitted to practice within the constraints of their licenses leave the school setting.

A formal process to address these challenges is long overdue. The proposed task force would provide a critical opportunity to articulate the challenges and propose systemic solutions, ensuring that licensed health care professionals can deliver safe and effective care to Oregon Students.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 2423. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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