

Submitter:

JESSICA WADE

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB2423

Members of the committee, I appreciate you taking the time to hear testimony on this bill. As the co chair of the OEA health professional committee, this bill will help ease the divide between education and health care licensing. As an occupational therapist, I have worked in the medical setting and education, both of which function very differently. After working in the the medical field for 10 years and moving over to special education, I was shocked by the lack of understanding of educators in regards to healthcare licensing and the amount of advocacy I needed to do to ensure that I was operating within my licensing requirements. It is essential to the safety of our students that this task force is established to allow licensing boards to review their rules to ensure their regulations align with the realities of school based occupational therapy. Lack of clarity in licensing rules creates confusion at best and dangerous conditions at worse. Therapists are being asked to do feeding and swallowing which is a highly specialized practice where trained therapists can provide safe feeding protocols to ensure students are safe while eating and swallowing at school. There are therapists around the state performing these evaluations without the proper specialized training which can lead to potentially deadly consequences. As a member of the feeding and swallowing team with MESD I can attest to the training and specialization required to perform such evaluations and write such protocols. Just because someone is a speech therapist or occupational therapist, does not mean they have the training to perform feeding and swallowing evaluations. We wouldn't require an elementary school teacher to teach high school math. They do not have that training. I was asked to work on speech sounds with a young child as an occupational therapist. When I brought up my concerns to administration, I was told that this is within my scope of practice as it's the primary service provider model. When in fact, this is not within my scope of practice. When licensing rules align, we can better collaborate to ensure the student is getting the support they need. Retention and requirement of health professionals working in education is a big challenge. During a listening session with health professionals from around the state, a common complaint and a reason for health professionals leaving education is the lack of understanding of our fields by educators and administrators. As we know retaining educators benefits our students and our budgets. I urge you, the committee to support HB 2423. This bill will ensure licensing boards and policymakers work together to create school appropriate standards which will strengthen our ability to serve students effectively. Thank you