

Dear Chair Doherty and Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Michael Salitore. I am the Executive Director of Supported Education in the Molalla River School District. While I do understand for the desire for special education evaluations to happen in a more timely fashion, HB 2673 is not the answer. I oppose HB 2673 for the following reasons:

1. Rural school districts are challenged by a shortage of qualified examiners. Even in a district of 2,300 students and 45 minutes from both Salem and Portland, the Molalla River School District is a rural school district. There is a significant shortage of people to do the work that some evaluations call for- mostly specialized professionals like Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and Speech-Language Pathologists. For example, I have been searching for a physical therapist to come to our district to conduct an evaluation that was signed for in the early fall and barely met the evaluation timeline because a PT in MESD happened to have a little time to give us to get the evaluation completed- cost is not a factor- but a shortage of professionals. In many rural districts, specialists are scheduled one to two days per month, and if a student is ill that day, then that pushes the timeline to the edge of the federally mandated 60 school days- we need that flexibility built into our guiding regulations.
2. Coordinating an appropriate evaluation simply takes time. For specialists in smaller districts to coordinate an appropriate evaluation, time is needed to not only do what is agreed upon in the evaluation planning process, but to orchestrate the process. With multiple specialists to coordinate with multiple layers of organizations providing services (from ESD's to Regional Services) to contract agencies, coordination simply takes time to get it right because of the multiple variables involved. Medical statements from the students physician at times relies on many factors outside of the school setting which frequently upsets timelines.

As a parent, I want the very best for my children as they are being educated in our state system. I understand the desire to move quickly as the process does seem inextricably long compared to an evaluation at OHSU's Child Development and Rehabilitation Center; although they have a 4 month waiting list- those comprehensive evaluations take about a day or two then the report is forthcoming a couple of weeks afterward. I understand parents are frustrated with how long it can take- and seem when their child is struggling in school.

I don't believe the answer is in mandating a shorter timelines, when the effects on district of all sizes, especially in smaller rural districts with limited access to highly specialized professionals, is profound and likely going to send us out of compliance.

I do believe that the answer is in clear leadership and guidance around the referral process and bigger systems changes/ supports toward Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Districts whereby there are universal screeners catch significant problems earlier and intervention can happen.

Sincerely,

Michael Salitore