

RE: House Bill 4022, Extension of PERS 1039 Exemption for SLP's to 2026

January 31, 2016

The purpose of this testimony is to provide you information on the nature of shortages of speech-language pathologists (SLP) since 2005, and the strategies developed and implemented by the Oregon Speech-Language and Hearing Association and other interested parties since that time to address this issue. As 2005 dawned there were major shortages of SLP's all over the state with rural areas the hardest hit. A survey of all education service districts (ESD) developed by the state association and Willamette Education Service District found that there were 100 open positions-many being available for two or more years without any applicants. Even school districts near the two major training programs at that time (University of Oregon and Portland State University) could not attract applicants. This survey did not include the K-12 school districts (K-12 districts) that employ their own SLP's.

The major effects of these openings was to deny children access to speech and language services in the Oregon schools. The 100 openings were equivalent to 60 full-time equivalents. If the average case load of an SLP was 60, the net result was that 3,600 students were not receiving the intervention they needed to improve their communication and thrive in school.

Some of the strategies being used by the K-12 districts and ESD's were use of contract SLP'S, contracting with retired SLP'S, Teacher Standards and Practices Commission temporarily licensing unqualified individuals to deliver speech and language services, paying higher salaries than many small districts could not afford, and providing sign-on bonuses. To compound the problem was reduced retention in the rural areas of the state.

Between the two SLP training programs, 50 students that are qualified to provide SLP services graduated each year. As a rule of thumb, those 25 graduates from Portland State University remained in the metropolitan area, and 50% of the 25 from the University of Oregon left the state, and the other half remained in or near the Eugene-Springfield area. That left the rest of the state with jobs that could not be filled.

One strategy was to create more new graduates and a grow-your-own approach for rural areas. Nova Southeastern University (the largest private university in Florida) agreed to offer a hybrid training model. This was 20-24 hours of direct instruction in the state with the remainder of each course delivered on line. This began in 2006, and 15-20 students have met all of the requirements to practice every 3 years since the first cohort. This has worked very well in training those in rural areas.

Due to the chronic nature of the shortage more money was allotted to hire faculty at both universities that were training SLP's. The result was an additional five to eight more openings for graduate students at the University of Oregon, and 25 more at Portland State University. On top of this, Pacific University started an SLP graduate program that opened about 3 years ago with 35 students graduating from the first class. The sum of this is that 110 SLP graduates are available each year--a gain of 85. Both the University of Oregon and Portland State University

have been working with the state department of education to place students in rural areas for their public school internship to introduce them to the people and cultures of these regions.

One of the successful approaches to the shortage has been for school districts to contract with retirees to provide services when positions go unfilled. With more graduates being produced the need for this has decreased; however, the shortage continues to plaque the rural regions of our state. This includes isolated areas such as Eastern and Southern Oregon and along the coast. Thus the option of contracting with retired SLP's is a desirable and viable means of filling open positions for SLP's who those who already meet the qualifications to perform the job.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,

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