

Testimony in Support of HB 4022
Genoa Ingram
Oregon Speech-Language & Hearing Association
February 16, 2016

HB 4022 reinstates the exemption for retired members of Public Employees Retirement System from the 1039 cap for speech-language pathologist or speech-language pathology assistants if re-employed by a school district or education service district. HB 4022 extends the sunset to January 2, 2026, to address long-term shortages of SLPs throughout the State, particularly in rural areas, and is a priority for the Oregon Speech-Language and Hearing Association (OSHA).

On the House side, there were two questions/concerns:

1. Are these retirees receiving their PERS retirement and then collecting PERS following re-hire?

Response: No, retirees do not collect PERS from their new jobs. In fact, school districts actually save money by not having to pay the PERS obligation.

2. Since there is such a shortage of these professionals, is there any long-term strategy to address the problem?

Response: Yes. Last session the legislature passed a bill to remove the requirement that SLPs be licensed by both the licensure board and Teacher Standards and Practices.

School-based SLPs/SLPAs serve students from 3-21 years of age and disorders range from a simple lisp to speech problems as a result of a brain injury or autism. A manageable case load is 60, but some SLPs serve as many as 80. These heavy caseloads can be particularly challenging in rural areas where there may be substantial distance between schools and the students served.

Regarding the long term strategy, Oregon currently has three graduate programs and all three are recruiting nationally. There may be as many as 300 candidates for 50 slots. In response, Pacific University added a program three years ago and Portland State recently expanded the number it can accommodate from 25-30 to 40-50.

Additionally, on the House side, we also discussed how rigorous the program is to become a Speech Therapist. The program is intense and is not for everyone.

OSHA's primary concern is that without this extension, there will be children who are unable to receive the therapy they need. We urge your support of HB 4022. February 16, 2016

Statement of Support for HB 4022
Kassie Wynveen, Program Administrator
Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education CSE
South Coast Education Service District

I have been the administrator for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education [EI/ECSE] program since the 2004 - 2005 school year and began supervising the K-12 Speech Language Pathologists [SLPs] in 2005-2006. I am a former SLP who spent 18 years in Lincoln County as a K-12 SLP before becoming an administrator at South Coast Education Service District [SCESD]. I can attest to the fact that finding SLPs on the Central and Southern Oregon Coast has been a challenge for the past 15 years or more. While working in Lincoln County, I experienced the expansion of my SLP assignment from one school, to two schools and finally to four schools and a final caseload of 85+ students, as the district came up short on candidates willing to relocate to the coast.

Once I arrived at SCESD, I learned first-hand how challenging it was for an administrator to hire and keep SLPs. Over the years the total SCESD SLP staff dropped from a high of [18] SLPs in 2006 - 2007 to the current [12] SLPs in 2015-2016. In that time, we have lost staff to retirement and relocation in and out of the state. We recently lost a new hire to two component school districts who went together to create their of K-12 speech program. Although we are fortunate to have [12] highly trained SLPs remaining, they do not all work full time, leaving us stretched thin in some settings. We have been fortunate to add [6] Speech Language Pathologists [SLPAs] to our staff in the last few years. But, while SLPAs are supportive of the day-to-day requirements of the EI/ECSE and K-12 programs, they are an inadequate substitute for an SLP. This is due to their limited training, SLP supervision requirements and restrictions on what an SLPA is allowed to do under their license.

Over the years, I have attended job fairs in Portland and Eugene, only to be told by candidates that they were not interested in interviewing for a position on the Oregon Coast. While there are now three programs training SLPs in the state, there continues to be a shortage of available SLP candidates as new graduates prefer to work in larger metropolitan areas, move out of state or go to work in a clinical setting. At one time we were able to cobble together additional services by hiring bits and pieces of one local SLP who left the field to raise her children and another who was retired and willing to come back in a limited capacity. The SCESD sponsored a candidate in the first cohort of students in the ODE partnership with the Nova Southeastern Communication Disorders program. That program turned out to be far more expensive than anticipated and the ODE stipend was inadequate to cover more than 25% of the overall costs of the program. Once done with the program, the SLP completed a two year obligation to the SCESD and left.

SCESD is not the only one in this area suffering from the shortage of SLPs. While one local district addressed the shortage by spreading existing SLPs across more assignments and adding an SLPA, another ended up going one full year with no SLP. For one full year the district used their Special Education Director, as licensed SLP, as the case manager for some children but services were limited. They contracted with SCESD the following year to provide SLP services and to assist the district with developing a compensatory plan. Fortunately, SCESD was able to provide an SLP for that one year but not the next, when we had to contract with an agency to provide a traveling SLP to complete the assignment. The next year the district was fortunate to recruit two SLPs, one with family ties in the area, who needed to complete their Clinical Fellowship Year and signed on with the district for an extended period of time.

Every year we wonder if this is the year we will not be able to meet the requirements of the EI/ECSE and K-12 speech programs. So far we have managed...but just barely. PERS retirees have been an essential component of our service plan for a number of years. Through my tenure as administrator of the programs, we have had at least [6] PERs retirees providing services to our kids. Of the [3] current PERs retirees, one is working full time, one is working less than full time (although the position requires a full time SLP) and the third retiree works part time. Donna Woods, a PERS retiree who will be directly affected by the PERs restrictions, went from being a part time SLP [.6 FTE] to a full time SLP [1.0 FTE] as the SCESD became less and less able to support one of our largest component districts and the ECSE program. As it is, she is serving both programs, with the assistance of an SLPA, spreading her much too thin with a combined caseload of more than [80] students. At this time, we need her services full time for the ECSE program and an additional K-12 SLP to meet the needs of the district.

It is no small task to convince someone to come live on the coast. While the scenery is beautiful, we lack many of the social and cultural activities that are appealing to younger SLPs, especially those that are single. In addition, we lack the amenities that can be found in a larger area. The South Coast also poses employment challenges for married SLPs who may be offered a job with the SCESD while the partner cannot find employment in the area. We lost two very interested candidates one year ago for this exact reason. We may still lose our newest SLPA due to lack of employment opportunities for her spouse. In the last three years we have been able to fill [2] SLP openings with people who either had a retirement home here in Coos County or wanted to move to Coos County because the spouse was retired and this is where they wanted to live. These are the exceptions not the rule.

We are now planning for the 2016- 2017 school year and I once again find myself posting positions here on the coast, hoping for another miracle. The candidate pool has not gotten bigger, in fact it has become smaller. Two years ago I had [7] candidates that I was corresponding with about our openings. From that pool, I was able to hire [1] SLP. Last year there were only [3] candidates for the K-12 SLP opening. I was able to hire [2] of the candidates because one had worked for us and had to leave for a year to take care of family and one was moving to Coos Bay following her husband's retirement.

The potential loss of [1] more full time SLP, because the PERs exception expired, would leave this agency with a gaping hole that we probably will not be able to fill. To put this all in perspective, since 2004-2005, the SCESD has had a total of [33] full/part time SLPs working in one or more of our programs. Of the [21] that we no longer employ...only [5] retired from the SCESD and only [1] of those continues to work as an SLP at SCESD. We currently employ [12] full/part time SLPs in one or more programs. Of those [12]; [3] are PERS retirees, only [1] of whom retired at full retirement age, leaving [2] working restricted hours. Of the remaining [9] SLPs, [4] are near PERs retirement, [3] are in the middle of their careers and [1] is just getting started.

Thinking of the future, I am encouraging my SLPAs that have an undergraduate degree in Communication Disorders to consider applying to graduate program. That raises a different issue, while the goal is to grow our own SLPs, once a candidate is accepted to a site-based graduate program we lose them for a minimum of [2] years and potentially they will never return to the Oregon Coast as a full blown SLP!

If you would like to any other information please feel free to email or call.

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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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