

To the Oregon Legislature:

Re: HB 3263

I am writing in support of the proposed legislation HB 3263 which adopts standards for the provision of occupational therapy to students who have individual education programs.

School-based OTs are clinicians that address sensorimotor, psychosocial, and cognitive skills to support children with disabilities to access their education and participate in the school environment.

I worked as a full-time occupational therapist in Portland Public Schools (PPS) from 2006 to 2011. When I started my OT position at Portland Public Schools in 2006 I had 63 students at 7 different schools on my caseload. When I left Portland Public Schools in 2011 I had 85 students at 8 different schools. One of major reasons that left my position in the schools was that I felt my ability to meet workload and caseload needs of my students was in violation of the AOTA Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics.

In addition to having a caseload of 85 students in the 2010-11 school year, I had 30-35 students referred by teachers for consideration for evaluation and occupational therapy services. In some cases I was able to suggest interventions that the teachers could enact to support the demonstrated needs of the students. Many times, however, these situations warranted formal evaluations and adding OT services. Documentation, including evaluations, present levels for the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and progress notes greatly added to my workload.

My PPS occupational therapy colleagues and I requested an additional occupational therapy position at the beginning of the 2010-11 school year. We were asked to provide extensive documentation on our workload hours and in the middle of March 2011 we were granted an additional OT position for the last 2 and 1/2 months of the school year. This OT position was then eliminated at the end of the 2010-11 school year, with no explanation given other than PPS was making cuts to all departments. Occupational therapists at PPS saw their full-time caseloads burgeon to nearly 100 students in the year that followed.

Other nearby school districts had occupational therapists reporting caseloads of 150 to 200 students per OT. Providing services for this number of students is not feasible and puts school-based OTs in violation of the federal IDEA law.

I was fortunate to have the services of a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) for 6 hours a week during to the 2010-11 school year. This was the only way that I could fulfill the service requirements for the students I served. If there is not increase in the number of occupational therapists serving in schools there at least needs to be an increase in COTAs to carry out OT interventions. These assistants are supervised by the occupational therapist and this supervision remains a part of the occupational therapist workload.

There are currently no state guidelines for school-based OT workloads in Oregon. I ask you to please support HB 3263 to ensure better management of OT services in the schools. This bill will improve student outcomes and ensure adherence to federal IDEA law. School-based OTs serve some of the most vulnerable children in Oregon and these children deserve to have effective school-based OT services that meet their needs.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this written testimony.

Sincerely,

Kara Ford, MOTR/L

Occupational Therapist