

Thank you to the Chairperson and Committee for taking time to read my letter.

My name is Karen Kline, and I am an Occupational Therapist who provides services to students in the schools. I am asking for your support for HB 3263, and I would like to share my experience with you as to why this is important for our students.

During my 20+-year career in the schools, I have provided tools and strategies for students with physical disabilities to be able to participate in their classrooms. In the last 10 or more years, there has been a great increase in referrals for assessment and provision of service to students who have difficulty staying "regulated": the ability to be calm and able to attend to instruction in the classroom in order to learn. These challenges are often related to diagnosed neurological differences such as autism, attention deficit, or psychological trauma related to insecure housing and/or maladaptive family life. Occupational Therapy practitioner's expertise in sensory-motor strategies have been in increasing demand by teachers and schools to help their students to learn to calm their emotions and bodies to be able to learn, so that they are able to teach their class of 25-30 students. Frequently the student's maladaptive behaviors disrupt the learning of their classmates. The caseloads in our district has increased as a result, and it is difficult to provide the degree of service that is needed.

Oregon has no guidelines at present for OT workloads. Because of this, caseloads in my district have risen to a degree which make it difficult to meet the needs of all the identified students, resulting in my work team and myself feeling frustrated and ethically compromised. I provide service to 131 students in 13 schools. In addition, I supervise an Occupational Therapy Assistant who assists me in providing service to 25 additional students. This is consistent with my colleagues' workloads. Retention of therapists in my district is becoming an issue. One of my colleagues who was very skilled and experienced recently resigned due to a caseload she felt to be unworkable.

I am aware workloads are different in other states, as Individualized Education Plans that come with a student from other states frequently include weekly OT service. Because the number of schools I serve, that is rare I can accommodate weekly support. In Washington state, the Olympia school therapist caseloads are capped to approximately 50 students per therapist who serves 2 or 3 schools, and the students have had experience with much more individualized service, whereas in Oregon, we are mostly providing consultation to teachers who have some of the largest class sizes in the nation.

Thank you for your time in reading this. I hope my letter has provided you with some helpful information. Please support the students in our state by providing a guideline for Occupational Therapy workload. It would make a big difference in advocating for our students in our individual districts.

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