

Hello,

My name is Erin Beavers, I have been an occupational therapist for 6 years, all of which has been working in a school-age kindergarten – 12th grade setting until recently where I now work in early childhood with children 3-5 years old. I have had the unique experience starting my career in Washington State prior to working in Oregon. My time in Washington provided me with a perspective of how dramatically different OT's service children in Oregon schools and the dire need of change. I would like to take this opportunity to discuss my experiences in both states in order to clarify why the support of HB 3263 is so important.

In Washington, I had a team of 9 OT's that met regularly to discuss caseloads, research, and team building. Each OT had a caseload average of 40-50 students and split between a maximum of 2 schools, but usually having a "home school" where they were a part of the regular staff. Every school we were at housed a therapy room with storage, equipment, and an area to provide treatment. Also every OT had their own office space with a computer and filing cabinet. The service model was a combination of direct and consultation, the OT would determine the appropriate service delivery for each child depending on the severity of their needs. The average student had 120 minutes per month of OT on their individualized service plan or IEP. This caseload, schedule, and work environment allowed me time to take thoughtful and data based clinical notes, update and contribute to IEP goals and progress, and collaborate regularly with my special ed teams. And, most importantly, it allowed me time to build rapport with my students and families which is the vital foundation of how we help our students and families gain skills and make progress.

Coming to Oregon, I faced completely different work setting. In my job interview, I was told that the sole service model for OT's was consultation. I would be split between 9 schools and adopting a caseload of 85 students. After working only a few months in this position, I discovered that I did not have regular meetings with other OT colleagues. My car became my office, my lunchroom, my equipment center, and storage. I spent hours in my car trying to get to all of my destinations to only spend a short time with each kid. Instead of the average student having 120 min/month of OT, in Oregon it was 120 min/year. I ask you to just stop and think about that. 120 min/mon to 120 min/year. It is difficult to imagine how any OT, no matter how experienced, can influence change and progress in only 2 hours a year. Due to the long hours per day in traveling, I noticed my ability to keep up with my notes dramatically decreased. I rarely was contributing to IEP's and I found it challenging to be present at all of meetings with my special ed teams to collaborate. It was challenging work. I tried my best to meet the needs of my students and families, but as time passed I felt I could never serve my students and families adequately. After 4 months of working in Oregon schools, I wanted to quit. However, I told myself that maybe it was my fault. I didn't have enough experience with the consultative model and to give it one more year. Exactly 1 year later, I gave my two weeks notice. I felt like my role as an OT was not only draining by unethical. I urge this bill to be supported because it is essential of school OT's to provide the best practice to our children. A state like Washington could be a resource in regard to a service delivery model and caseload size that could help Oregon adopt new standards.

I promise you, as OT's we can do amazing things to better the lives of our special needs students and their families if we have reasonable workload, caseload, and environment to support it.