

To: House Committee on Education
From: Minaz Chauthani, M.S. OTR/L, Occupational Therapist (OT)
RE: Support for HB 2959

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Hudson and members of the committee—

My name is Minaz Chauthani, and I am here today as an occupational therapist of Salem Keizer Public School for 9 years, and I am here to express my support for House Bill 2959.

As a trained health professional in schools, I am both licensed and practice within school systems and settings that can sometimes conflict with one another. We believe our students deserve the best possible educational journey at every turn and we know that the barriers that provide for these conflicting rules to our licensure are systemic, so we know the solutions will take long-term commitment and dedication.

Our caseloads are such that time is extremely limited, so finding time to train others safely and correctly is sacrificed. Over the years that I've worked for Salem Keizer, I started with about 8 schools during my first year and went up to 15 this year, with a few more alternative education programs to keep track of as well. Part of this is due to our staffing shortage, which one cause of this is our high burnout rate that therapists experience due to the stressors of this role, as evidenced by the proposal of this bill.

OTs are responsible for making the determination if a student needs an OT evaluation. Often, other educators want to make, and do make, this recommendation, without consulting us. According to our practice act, it is the OT's professional responsibility to make that determination. There have been many occasions where my colleagues and I have been requested to do OT evaluations, and it was determined that OT services weren't necessary. If we had been given a chance to assist the educator team in the process of determining whether an evaluation needed to be completed, we could have potentially avoided doing unnecessary work that took time away from our already large caseloads.

With the introduction of MTSS, our roles in prevention has expanded. As an OT, my lens brings forth much in way of Tier 1 and Tier 2 services. Our background in mental health and regulation is imperative to the success of our students. Environmental stimuli and overload has increased the level of anxiety our students present coming into schools. As an OT, we are equipped to modify and adapt the environments to support inclusive learning. My advanced training in sensory processing lends a unique lens to which I can understand and offer guidance and support around the underlying issues that are preventing a student from accessing their education. This alone will support ALL students and our presence at the table is imperative.

One clear concern expressed by members from all licensed professionals working in an education setting is the disconnect between requirements of licensure and the realities of practice in schools. We need to be compensated for our level of expertise and training we bring to the table. We need to be competitive with the private sector to ensure we are fully staffed and adhering to our licensure requirements. That is why we need HB 2959, which will create a

Task Force to examine the scope of practice for each type of licensed health professional in schools, establish criteria to help define when procedures are inconsistent with scope of practice, and provide recommendations for alignment.

Thank you for your time today and I encourage the committee to vote YES on HB 2959.

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