

To: House Committee on Education  
From: Tracy Zapf, Speech-Language Pathologist  
RE: Support for HB 2959

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

My name is Tracy Zapf, and I am here today as a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) of eight years to express my support for House Bill 2959.

My greatest concerns in relation to SLPs in schools revolve around lack of respect for our professional judgment, and the difficulty of our scope of practice. Many decisions that affect our group of 100+ SLPs in my school district are made without the input of a licensed SLP. We have no SLPs at the administrative level of Special Education, so decisions are often made within our schools that conflict with SLP best practices. For example, all students on our caseloads are counted as one, though we all know students with differing abilities require a different amount of time to support. Students who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) require extra time from the SLP to program their device, train teachers and paraeducators, and meet with the district AT/AAC team. When decisions are made of what counts as a caseload, and each student is just counted as one, our professional judgment is ignored and stifled.

Additionally, the scope of practice of SLPs is incredibly large, and only seems to be getting larger within the schools. We can be called on to be experts in feeding, literacy, autism, AAC, speech sounds, stuttering, selective mutism, language, voice, hearing, behavior, and more. When we have such large caseloads and are pulled in so many different directions, we are not able to give our students the support they deserve. Because school-based SLPs have limited opportunities to specialize, we are expected to wear many hats, all while juggling an ever increasing caseload of students. The fit of a medically-based job into the school settings feels like it needs further examination, before we end up doing so many things that we can't do any one thing well.

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. 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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