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*The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.*

**House Bill 572: Written Proponent Testimony**  
**Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee**  
**December 4, 2018**

Chairman Hottinger, Vice Chair Hackett, Ranking Member Brown and Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Davis, I work in Government Relations for the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of the 125,000 members of OEA, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 572. This bill would restore a full year of OPERS service credit to non-teaching staff of County Board of Developmental Disabilities who work during the school year.

The employees who would be helped by House Bill 572 are dedicated public servants who work with some of Ohio's most vulnerable students. They continue to contribute 10% of their salary towards their pension benefits but are no longer receiving a full year of service credit per school year. Reduced service credit has an adverse effect on the retirement planning and economic security of these employees. They deserve equal treatment to the teachers they work alongside and the non-teaching employees of school districts who receive a full year of service credit towards their retirement.

House Bill 572 is narrowly-tailored to address this specific situation. The bill would require OPERS to grant a full year of service credit to employees who meet the following conditions: 1) are employed by a County Board of DD; 2) work in a position that would be covered by the School Employees Retirement System (SERS) if they were employed by a school district; and 3) perform full-time service for at least nine months of the year and paid earnable salary in each month of that year.

The bill was passed unanimously by the Ohio House. OEA urges favorable consideration by the Committee and passage by the full Senate prior to the end of this session.

Included with my testimony are statements in support of HB 572 from several employees who would be directly helped by the bill. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.



## **HB 572: Statements of Support**

My name is Lori Burns. I am an Occupational Therapist with 18+ years of experience, all working within the OPERS system. The majority (almost 17 years) of that time has been working for the Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities, with some of the most wonderful students one could meet, at Forest Rose School. I love my job and being able to provide a level of needed service delivery that these students have been unable to receive within their home school districts.

As a member of OPERS, in the fall of 2017 I (along with many co-workers) was informed that after almost 17 years of providing high quality occupational therapy service delivery to students, that I would no longer be receiving a full year of OPERS service credit for working a school year. This is very dis-heartening to a highly devoted public servant, as it means that I will now have to work at least 2 ½ years longer before I am eligible for full retirement benefits. On paper, this might not seem like much, but time is precious, and I have plans for my future, including retirement within a timeframe that was established when I started working within OPERS 18+ years ago. Co-workers of mine who are part of STRS and other school employees within SERS (both systems that can be combined with OPERS for retirement) provide their school employees working 9-10 months with a full year credit. Although paid time for school employees is contingent upon a 9-10 month schedule, in actuality much work occurs off the clock during evenings, weekends and summers. My hope is that the job that I do will be given the same consideration within the OPERS system as colleagues who are within the STRS and SERS systems.

Thank you for taking your time to understand my situation (and the situation many co-workers are in). Please support HB 572 to address an issue that is having a significant impact on my current stress level as well as a potential long-term effect on my future.

Lori Burns, MS, OTR/L

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My name is Tara Kehl. I have worked at the Coshocton County Board as a paraprofessional for 22 years and two years before that as a substitute. I play a key role in the success of my students. It is extremely unjust that our work is de-valued by having our service credit reduced to 9 months instead of twelve. Paraprofessionals work side-by-side with teachers, who get a year of service credit for each school year.

In the DD setting, the teacher and paraprofessionals work hand in hand to achieve the best education as possible for our students. Over the years, many students have been successful in learning life skills and transitioning into the working world, or a workshop setting. This happens due to the teacher and parapro working together to make that happen.

I do not have any plans on retiring anytime soon, yet with this new rule, it will take me many more years of service to make up the three months lacking per school year. Please pass House Bill 572 to correct this situation.

Tara Kehl ( Paraprofessional ) Hopewell School

Hello, I'm Jenny Smith, Instructor assistant for Dale Roy school, in Ashland, Ohio. I urge you to pass HB 572 that deals with OPERS service credit for non-teaching County DD employees.

Since my fellow employees and I received the notice of losing retirement credit as a 9-month employee it's been a punch in the gut. Yes, we may only be paraprofessionals, but in the summer we still help plan lessons and work in our classrooms with our fellow teachers. Our school accountant changed our pay to 9 months, and we were told we'd make more money, but they didn't account for 3 months benefit deductions plus more taxes taken out. We don't make a lot of money to begin with.

I'm a 47 year old team member for my school, but may have to go to a factory job to make ends meet for over the summer. I have 2 sons that have Irritable bowel diseases, that I help with their medications. I'm their main source of major medical insurance providers. In the case of having to find a new job, I will lose some of those benefits. We have good insurance, but I finally have fought with them and doctors to cover my son's prescription. I have worked for Ashland county Board of DD, for 16 years, and the changes I've seen are mind-blowing. It makes life harder and harder. I love my job, but I really need this job paid over the summer for my family and my retirement.

I'm hoping that our stories will be heard and that this committee will make sure to pass HB 572 to addresses this issue.

Thank you for all that you do.

Jenny Smith

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My name is Lisa Stanley. I have worked for Ashland County Board for 23 years now up until Jan 2018 I was a 12-month employee. Then changes were made and I had to take a position in the school. My pay was cut drastically. Then they tell us we can't take our pay over 12 months so now I have no pay in the summer. Now they say I only get 9 months credit for my retirement. So that adds 4 more years to me. How is a person supposed to live?

I have 2 small children and now I have to find more employment. Simply put, I'm tired of getting jerked around and my family suffering. I need your help.

HB 572 will restore a full year of service credit to DD employees who work during the school year. It is only fair that we be treated on equal footing to teachers and support staff who work directly for school districts instead of second-class citizens.

Please support this change.

Lisa Stanley

My name is Beth Tumblin. I am strongly in support of HB 572 that will restore a full year of service credit to County Board of Developmental Disability employees who work on a school calendar.

I am a physical therapist assistant that has worked for a County Board of DD for almost 32 years. My first 9 years of employment were considered self-employed. I have received service credit from OPERS for 23 years. During that time, my paycheck has reflected a consistent amount of OPERS pension takeout. What I am facing now, along with other non-teaching employees who work on a school calendar, is a varying amount being taken out under OPERS pension. This makes it difficult for me to budget from paycheck to paycheck.

As well, I have been planning for retirement for some time. Ultimately, this change will increase the amount of time that I need to work towards my retirement goals. I have had this yearly service credit from OPERS for 23 years. It seems quite unfair to me, for whatever reason, that OPERS is now saying that I don't get a full year when I work my typical school calendar. I believe in order to maintain quality people in the DD setting, this needs to be reinstated.

If you have any further questions or comments, please feel free to contact me.

Beth Tumblin

Licensed Physical Therapist Assistant, Coshocton County

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My name is Lynnette Hardesty. I am asking for your support in passing House Bill 572 that restores a full year of service credit to employees who work with special needs children for our County Boards of DD.

This is my 18th year with Coshocton County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Hopewell School. Eighteen years ago, I left a job with a public school paying into SERS. I chose to accept a position at Hopewell School because I thought it would be more rewarding working with children with special needs. I love my job, but I believe it is unfair to receive less service credit towards retirement than the teachers I work beside or my counterparts in local school districts.

If I continue to receive only  $\frac{3}{4}$  credit for each year I work this will seriously impact my retirement planning. I will either have to work several years longer or see my pension reduced significantly.

Again, I am asking for your favorable consideration of HB 572 to find a solution to this issue that is hurting me and my coworkers.

Lynnette Hardesty, Coshocton County Bd of DD Hopewell School