

99th House District

Parts of Ashtabula
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Sarah Fowler Arthur
State Representative

Sponsor Testimony – HB 440 – Regards special needs scholarship services and service providers

Chair Manning, Ranking Member Robinson, and fellow members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for hearing sponsor testimony on House Bill 440 today.

This legislation will modify current statutes to (1) allow services provided under the Jon Peterson Special Needs or Autism scholarship programs to be offered remotely by qualified credentialed providers, and (2) to require certain credentialed professionals to be included on the list of who may provide services under the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program.

Several amendments have been requested by stakeholders which would enhance the consistency of the services through telehealth providers across the state as they serve students with unique needs and learning challenges and we anticipate bringing these to the committee in the form of a sub-bill at the next bill hearing.

During the last General Assembly¹, the legislature made permanent the provision of certain telehealth services through licensed healthcare professionals. Many of these remote services are through providers eligible to serve students receiving the Jon Peterson Scholarship or Autism Scholarship which has greatly benefited students who formerly may not have had access to a local provider.

This requirement extended what had been temporarily allowed during the Covid-19 pandemic and thus greatly benefitted students who live in rural and remote areas in Ohio, often with limited access to in-person services. Some families related stories of driving hours each week before Covid to obtain the services identified in their child's IEP and they expressed gratitude for the flexibility to receive services remotely during the pandemic and subsequently.

Unfortunately, communications from DEW/ODE around telehealth services for children receiving these scholarships have been unclear and confusing over the past six months, causing providers uncertainty about their ability to continue meeting the needs of students with unique learning challenges through these programs. This is especially true for Licensed Intervention Specialists and Education Aides, as they are licensed through the State Board of Education rather than a professional healthcare board covered in the telehealth services law.

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HB 440 expands the current telehealth provisions to include Intervention Specialists and Education Aides so that there will be no lapse in service for these students.

Lastly, we are asking the committee to consider this bill expediently so that the services of Intervention Specialists and Educational Aids will continue to be available consistent with the other services provided through a student' IEP.

I thank the committee for hearing our testimony on House Bill 440 and welcome any questions on this legislation.



1 - House Bill 122 of the 134th General Assembly enacted 4743.09, which required health care professional licensing boards to permanently permit certain health care professionals under their jurisdiction to provide services as telehealth services.